

“CHRONICLES OF OUR TIME:”  
FEMINISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM IN APPROPRIATIONS OF  
SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS

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## ABSTRACT

JENNIFER FLAHERTY: "Chronicles of Our Time:"  
Feminism and Postcolonialism in Appropriations of Shakespeare's Plays  
(Under the direction of Jessica Wolfe)

My dissertation argues that dramatic revisions of plays by Shakespeare address key theoretical debates in theatrical forums. My approach to Shakespeare's reception moves beyond 'reader response' to 'writer response,' suggesting that adaptations reveal the underlying possibilities and problems that resonate with successive generations as they read Shakespeare's plays. My primary focus is on the critical style of adaptation that emerged in the late twentieth century after playwrights such as Ionesco and Stoppard began appropriating Shakespeare. By making distinct alterations in iconic texts, these authors rely on an audience's foreknowledge of Shakespeare's plays to establish what I call 'creative dissonance:' identifiable changes that illustrate the author's social agenda. Just as postcolonial and feminist critics of Shakespeare focus on characters who have been marginalized by previous generations, these playwrights liberate marginalized characters from their texts and place them at the center of new dramas.

Using feminist and postcolonial criticism, I argue that authors who rewrite Shakespeare's female characters and Shakespeare's cultural 'others' (for example, Caliban, Othello, and Shylock) address and affect theories of biological and social difference. My first section examines the shifts in appropriations of Shakespeare's heroines that take place with the rise of feminist criticism of Shakespeare. I give

particular attention to the transformations of Desdemona and Juliet in chapters on Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*. In the second section, I examine the ways that changing concepts of otherness, as exemplified by postcolonial theory, have impacted revisions of characters such as Othello, Shylock, and Caliban. I devote two chapters to adaptations of *The Tempest*: Aimé Césaire's Caribbean *Une Tempête* and Raquel Carrió's Cuban *Otra Tempestad*. As a recognizable medium through which playwrights articulate their own social commentary, these plays function as key indicators of the ideals and biases of a particular cultural moment.

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## SECTION I

### INTRODUCTION

For the past four hundred years, readers of Shakespeare have recreated his plays in their own images through criticism, performance, and adaptation. Even for people who are not in academia, Shakespeare has become part of our daily vocabulary, and we use Shakespeare to articulate our own particular worldviews. It is important to look at the critical and cultural reception of Shakespeare to understand not just how Shakespeare has been read by each generation or nation, but how Shakespeare has been used to read key issues in contemporary society. With feminist and postcolonial critics of Shakespeare focusing their attention on characters who have been ‘marginalized’ by previous generations, playwrights have taken it upon themselves to liberate these characters from their texts and place them at the center of new dramas. I argue that these transformations of Shakespeare’s plays address critical issues in a creative format, filtering important theoretical debates through original drama. Feminist and postcolonial influences in criticism and adaptation have established Shakespeare as a global language through which issues of gender and race can be addressed.

The idea that individuals or social groups could customize Shakespeare through interpretation or appropriation is a relatively recent phenomenon. In 1971 anthropologist Laura Bohannan published an article entitled “Shakespeare in the Bush.” In the article, Bohannan recounts her attempt to tell the story of *Hamlet* to the tribal elders of the Tiv in

West Africa. She begins her story “quite sure that *Hamlet* had only one possible interpretation, and that one universally obvious” (Bohannon 25). The Tiv elders quickly disprove her theory by enthusiastically supporting the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius because a man should make sure that the wife of his dead brother is provided for. They dismiss the ghost of Hamlet’s father as a zombie, and they pity Hamlet because they believe that his madness must be the result of witchcraft. When Bohannon takes issue with their interpretations, insisting that they are getting the story wrong, the Tiv elders respond:

It is clear that the elders of your country have never told you what the story really means... You must tell us some more stories of your country. We, who are elders, will instruct you in their true meaning, so that when you return to your own land your elders will see that you have not been sitting in the bush, but among those who know things and who have taught you wisdom. (Bohannon 31)

By telling the story of *Hamlet* to the Tiv, Bohannon attempted to prove that literary texts, particularly Shakespeare’s, are universal by establishing that a single text is interpreted in one way across cultures. Bohannon and many of her readers would argue that her experiment proves that the opposite is true—that literature cannot be universal if different individuals or cultures can have wildly different interpretations of the same text because of their own customs, ideas, and biases. As a scholar working on the worldwide reception of Shakespeare’s plays, I find that I have a different definition of what makes a text ‘universal.’

Rather than searching for the ‘one’ Shakespeare—the perfect form of Shakespeare that readers or actors can ‘get right’—my dissertation explores a multiplicity of ‘Shakespeares’ in a variety of formats. One of the reasons that Shakespeare’s plays continue to have a global impact four hundred years after their first performances is that



readers and audience members from all over the world can interpret and transform the plays to suit a particular cultural milieu. I believe the greatest testament of Shakespeare's universal appeal is the infinite variety of critical and creative interpretations of Shakespeare that have accumulated over the past four hundred years. This vast body of work, which includes plays, poems, novels, short stories, films, performances, music, artwork, and copious amounts of literary criticism, is commonly known as Shakespeare's "Afterlife." To study Shakespeare's Afterlife is to examine the ways that Shakespeare has bridged historical and national boundaries as each successive generation has made his plays their own. As an anthropologist, Bohannan states that her objective in the experiment was to use Shakespeare to prove that "human nature was pretty much the same the world over" (Bohannan 25). A study of Shakespeare's Afterlife indicates that the instinct to interpret and re-make cultural expressions in our own image might be a shared human response that inadvertently reveals cultural differences as well as similarities.

Studies in Shakespeare's Afterlife are about more than just interpreting Shakespeare—they are about interpreting interpretations of Shakespeare. Critical and cultural responses to Shakespeare can be read in dialogue with Shakespeare's texts themselves. Afterlife studies are therefore tied to the study of reception theory and literary history. Reception theory began with the work of Hans Robert Jauss, who in 1967 argued that "the quality and rank of a literary work result neither from the biographical or historical conditions of its origin, nor from its place in the sequence of the development of a genre alone, but rather from the criteria of influence, reception, and posthumous fame" (Jauss). Jauss' argument does not directly translate to studies of Shakespeare's

Afterlife; such studies are usually not preoccupied with determining Shakespeare's "quality and rank." But the idea that a text can be read through its impact as well as its origins is central to understanding Shakespeare and the varied reactions his texts inspire. In the introduction to her book *Talking Back to Shakespeare*, Martha Tuck Rozett explains that by taking a college-level Shakespeare course, her students are entering into a cultural tradition of responding to Shakespeare, joining the ranks of "editors, bowdlerizers, stage directors, parodists, playwrights, libretticists, novelists, and filmmakers" (3). Shakespeare's texts do not exist in a vacuum. By exploring the different ways that people can respond to Shakespeare, it is possible to learn about the flexible nature of Shakespeare's texts—and about the preconceptions and preferences of the respondents themselves.

A study of the way that a particular play has been read or performed reveals the underlying possibilities and problems in the text that resonate with successive generations. In his introduction of the term "literary anthropology," Wolfgang Iser argues that one can read a society through its responses to literature:

If a literary text does something to its readers, it also simultaneously reveals something about them. Thus literature turns into a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, inclinations, and eventually our overall makeup. (Iser vii)

The concept of literary anthropology is implicit in studies of Shakespeare's afterlife; through our readings of Shakespeare, we learn something about ourselves. Or, as Marjorie Garber states in the opening to her latest book, "Shakespeare makes modern culture and modern culture makes Shakespeare" (*Shakespeare and Modern Culture* xiii). Shakespeare has become one of the most prominent "divining rods" in literature,

illuminating the pre-suppositions and beliefs that show up in criticism, adaptations, and performances of plays.

As readers of Shakespeare's plays, we take our interpretations from our own views and experiences as well as the texts. Iser explains that a reader's response to a text emerges from the "gaps" that make up the "no-man's-land of indeterminacy" between conflicting views of a text, arguing that "these gaps give the reader a chance to build his own bridges...the unformulated connections between the particular views" (Iser 9-10). Some texts have more "gaps" than others, and Shakespeare's plays have an inherent flexibility that leaves them open to an incredibly wide range of interpretations. Comparing reinterpretations of Shakespeare to reinterpretations of the Bible, Guido Almansi argues that "the constant updating of Shakespeare has been tangibly encouraged by the supreme ambiguity of the playwright himself...only *settled* texts are allowed to go to rest and fall beyond the horizon" (88). The study of Shakespeare's reception reveals that Shakespeare's texts are anything but "settled." Different generations and movements (Almansi cites "the Augustans, the Romantics, the Victorians, now by the existentialists") redefine Shakespeare by using their own ideologies to settle and resettle the texts by filling in those gaps. The perceived cultural familiarity with Shakespeare makes him a strong subject for studies of reception—his enduring popularity makes him a control by which interpretation can be studied across national and historical boundaries. The afterlife of a particular play or character can be traced by analyzing criticism and how it changes over time, as Elaine Showalter does in her article on "Representing Ophelia." It's also possible to look at the ways that Shakespeare's plays have permeated popular culture and expression, through texts such as Marjorie Garber's *Shakespeare and Modern*

*Culture*. In this dissertation, I examine Shakespeare's reception by looking at adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, with an emphasis on original plays that rewrite Shakespeare's characters for new audiences.

My approach to reception history moves beyond 'reader response' to 'writer response,' suggesting that revisions reveal the underlying possibilities and problems that resonate with successive generations as they read Shakespeare's plays. Iser argues that "it is quite impossible for the text itself to fill the gaps" because "nothing is formulated in the text itself; rather, the reader himself produces these innovative readings" (Iser 9-10). Like reader responses, the texts that I explore in the following chapters are "innovative readings" that emerge from the "gaps" in Shakespeare's plays. As both readers and writers, the authors that I study produce new texts that do what Iser argues the original text cannot do—fill those indeterminate spaces with a reading. But each reading takes the form of a new text, with its own "gaps" and "slippages." In the following chapters, I examine the ways that Shakespeare has been adapted in a variety of formats—theater, opera, stories, novels. While all of these texts offer readings of Shakespeare, my emphasis is on four plays that use their readings of Shakespeare to develop new dramas about gender and colonialism.

The study of Shakespearean adaptation is hindered by the lack of a comprehensive and effective vocabulary that critics can use to define, categorize, and critique the texts. As one of the first scholars to assemble a modern critical history of Shakespearean adaptations, Ruby Cohn attempted to create both a vocabulary and a system of classification for the area of study in 1976, acknowledging the difficulty of the task considering the vague and numerous terms that could describe these works.

Throughout the book, she uses the word ‘offshoot’ to denote any “rewriting of Shakespeare,” including everything from performance art inspired by Shakespeare to a novel about a Shakespearean character to a production of a Shakespearean play that has been cut due to length (3). To Cohn, an ‘adaptation’ is a narrower category, characterized by the addition of new material to the text, and differentiated from ‘transformation,’ for which invention is necessary (3). Cohn’s system, however, has never been truly adopted by other critics. New terms have been suggested, like Marianne Novy’s ‘re-visions’ or the Royal Shakespeare Company’s ‘responses.’ ‘Off-shoot’ is seldom used except in direct reference to Cohn. Although ‘transformation’ and ‘adaptation’ are still mentioned frequently, they have adopted meanings that differ sharply from Cohn’s use of them. In much of the recent criticism of Shakespearean revisions, the word ‘adaptation’ is used in much the same way that Cohn describes ‘offshoot’—a blanket term used to define any changes made to Shakespeare’s text. Because ‘adaptation’ and ‘appropriation’ have come to be used almost interchangeably, I will use both throughout the dissertation to refer to texts that alter Shakespeare.

Since Cohn’s attempts to provide a vocabulary for the field, no critic has provided an alternate vocabulary for the entire area study, choosing instead to give a lengthy list of all the alternatives and lament the inadequacy of each of them. The word ‘transformation’ has sometimes been used to describe the type of adaptation I am most interested in—response texts that create dialogue with Shakespeare through alteration. Cohn deals with the term ‘transformation’ only briefly, and the examples that she provides contradict her definition at times, but it has endured better than either ‘offshoot’ or Cohn’s version of

‘adaptation.’ For the book *Beyond Adaptation*, Phyllis Frus redefines the category of transformation as:

A reworking of a text, either canonical or popular, in a significant way, such as by telling a story from a different perspective and engaging themes and issues that were left out of the previous version; using a familiar plot but varying the setting, situation, and/or characters; updating the source text to reflect a new social, political, and cultural context; or radically transforming a source by using parallel plot events and similar characters without being constrained by the earlier plot. (Frus)

In *Talking Back to Shakespeare*, Martha Tuck Rozett rejects Cohn’s term ‘offshoots,’ Michael Scott’s term ‘feed-offs,’ and Alan Sinfield’s term ‘reconstitutions’ in favor of the word ‘transformation’ (Rozett 8). Rozett explains that “the author of a transformation is engaging in dismantling, rearranging, sometimes fracturing the text, sometimes adding to or inverting it, and then reassembling it into a recognizable re-imagining of the play as we know it” (8). In addition to introducing new terms (displacement/replacement and creative dissonance), I use the term ‘transformation’ frequently throughout the dissertation.

Adaptation has been criticized for being “derivative,” “parasitic,” and opposed to “originality and individuality” (Hutcheon 4). As Laura Rosenthal states, “to call [a text] an adaptation diminishes it, for in a culture of literary property, originality becomes a primary value in art” (335). If originality is something to be praised, adaptations become “secondary.” Shakespearean adaptations are especially problematic given that Shakespeare’s prominent place in the canon often inspires unflattering comparisons. Jonathan Bate states that “Shakespearean parody, for all its immediate comic and ironic sharpness, is ultimately a mean and limited thing when set beside the magnanimity and breadth of the plays themselves” (Bate 89). Even critics who focus on issues of

adaptation and transformation take on a defensive note at times. Ruby Cohn opens her groundbreaking book on *Shakespearean Offshoots* in a preemptive strike against this sort of criticism: “It is easy to predict a conclusion to this book...no modern Shakespearean offshoot has improved upon the original” (vii). The editors of the book *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, Mark Fortier and Daniel Fischlin, insert an ironic note into their introduction by stating that “if [Kurosawa’s] *Ran* is an adaptation, it cannot be the masterpiece we take it to be” (4). Attacks on adaptation (and even defenses of adaptation) often imply that all Shakespearean adaptations aim to equal or improve upon the original text—an oversimplified generalization.

It is true that some past playwrights found Shakespeare’s plays unpolished or unfashionable and sought to create ‘new and improved’ versions, with Nahum Tate’s Restoration version of *King Lear* as a prominent example. In Tate’s time, Shakespeare’s dramas were viewed as naturally brilliant but technically flawed (Smith, 2). The most common criticisms include Shakespeare’s failure to adhere to the three unities and to the ideal of a drama that illustrates poetic justice and provides moral instruction for its audience by rewarding virtue and punishing vice.<sup>1</sup> With his adaptation of *King Lear*, Tate rewrites Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to adhere more closely to the tenets of poetic justice by giving Lear, Cordelia and Edgar a happy ending, in which the kingdom is restored to Lear, who transfers it to Cordelia, who becomes Queen and marries Edgar. Tate describes Shakespeare’s *King Lear* as “a Heap of Jewels, unstrung and unpolisht; yet so dazling in their Disorder, that I soon perceiv'd I had seiz'd a Treasure” (Tate, preface). By ‘stringing

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<sup>1</sup> John Dennis, who criticized Shakespeare’s work heavily for its lack of poetic justices, argues that “I conceive that every Tragedy ought to be a very solemn Lecture, inculcating a particular Providence and showing it plainly protecting the good and chastising the bad, or at least the violent.” For more information, see Marsden, page 66.

and polishing the jewels' of Shakespeare's text to create his own version of *King Lear*, Tate presents his play as a new and improved *Lear*. As Laura Rosenthal notes, Tate does not "place [his] version side by side with Shakespeare's as a different way of telling the same story; rather...after his own improvements, Tate's preface implies, why would anyone want to perform Shakespeare's old play any more?" (Rosenthal, 329). By many accounts, Tate's attempt to usurp Shakespeare was successful for some time; Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier note that Tate's version "was to effectively replace Shakespeare's original on the English stage well into the nineteenth century. For 150 years, in the theater, Tate's version, with some modifications, was the only *King Lear* to be had" (66). Samuel Johnson greatly preferred Tate's version to Shakespeare's. Although Tate does mention Shakespeare's name with reverence in the prologue to his version, the preface that Tate addresses to Thomas Boteler makes it clear that Tate's version is meant to correct the 'flaws' of Shakespeare's version—to replace it rather than offer a new interpretation of the original play.

With the rise of intellectual property law and 'Bardolatry,' however, Shakespearean adaptation is now more likely to be a companion text than a replacement text. By the mid-twentieth century, the alteration of Shakespeare's works could be interpreted as a challenge to dominant modes of thought or theatrical presentation rather than as an attempt to improve upon Shakespeare's work. Postmodern adaptations of *King Lear* do not overwrite Shakespeare's *King Lear*—they enter into dialogue with it. Examples can be found in texts such as Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971), Marina Carr's *The Cordelia Dream* (2008), or *Lear's Daughters* (1987) by Elaine Feinstein and the



Women's Theatre Group.<sup>2</sup> As a prequel, *Lear's Daughters* explores the development of Shakespeare's characters in a series of scenes that build up to the moment that Shakespeare's play begins. The action of *Lear's Daughters* implies that the plot of *King Lear* remains intact, offering the audience a shift in perspective on the Lear narrative. Instead of trying to replace Shakespeare's plot, as Tate does, Elaine Feinstein and WTG concentrate on filling in the gaps and silences of the original story. To understand the plot and the characters of Tate's *King Lear*, a member of the audience need not be familiar with the details of Shakespeare's text and the contrast between the two versions. *Lear's Daughters*, by contrast, cannot be understood without at least a rough knowledge of Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

*Lear's Daughters* is part of a much more recent trend in adapting Shakespeare—one which is more concerned with responding to Shakespeare's plays than improving them. Although both adaptations make significant changes in the characters of Lear's daughters, Tate's characters do not function as critical explorations of Shakespeare's characters the way that the characters created by Feinstein and WTG do. Instead, Tate's *King Lear* is meant to take the place of Shakespeare's text, eliminating the ambiguities rather than illuminating them. If Tate's text is a transformation or response that proved effective at "replacing" Shakespeare, *Lear's Daughters* has more of a "displacing" effect. By offering readers and audiences a different perspective on Shakespeare's plays, authors such as Feinstein are displacing (or de-centering) Shakespeare, shifting the original text aside and putting a new text alongside it.

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<sup>2</sup> Because *Lear's Daughters* is the result of a collaborative effort between Elaine Feinstein and several members of the Women's Theatre Group, I will refer to the play as authored by 'Feinstein and WTG.' For a more detailed account of the authorship of *Lear's Daughters*, see Goodman, page 97. Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993), 97.

In psychoanalysis, the term “displacement” refers to “an unconscious defense mechanism whereby the mind redirects emotion from a ‘dangerous’ object...to a more acceptable or less threatening object” (Peled 17). This definition makes the term “displacement” particularly relevant for analyzing the feminist and postcolonial revisions of Shakespeare that I examine in the later chapters of my dissertation. Texts such as Césaire’s *Une Tempête* and Carrió’s *Otra Tempestad* displace Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* by rewriting the plot or offering a new perspective. MacDonald’s *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and Vogel’s *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* take the same approach with Shakespeare’s *Othello*. But they also function as “displacement” texts by using Shakespeare’s characters as “acceptable” and recognizable objects through which politically and emotionally charged subjects can be addressed. The familiarity of Shakespeare’s texts combined with the authority of Shakespeare’s reputation make his characters ideal stand-ins for oppressed and marginalized populations. As Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin explain, “negotiations and contestations of culture, and battles for agency...were often enacted via Shakespeare’s reputation” (7). Through adaptation, it is possible to talk about the positions of women in society through Shakespeare’s *Desdemona* or colonialism through Shakespeare’s *Caliban*.

Laura Rosenthal argues that “at the same time that Tate represents Shakespeare as the original owner of the story, Shakespeare does not become, as in our own age, the *perpetual* owner of the text” (329). This distinction highlights a fundamental difference between the way that Tate’s *King Lear* treats Shakespeare’s text and way that *Lear’s Daughters* does. In Restoration England, the name of Shakespeare was not so formidable

that it was impossible to believe that Tate could have transformed Shakespeare's "Heap of Flow'rs" into a "Garland" (Tate, preface). By contrast, in twentieth century England, Shakespeare's perpetual ownership of the Lear story is a general cultural construct, if not a legal one (Rosenthal, 331). Modern authors of adaptations, therefore, must assume a working knowledge of Shakespeare from the audience, and they are able (even expected) to engage in critical discourse with the original text, as Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theater Group do in *Lear's Daughters*.

The perception of Shakespeare as "perpetual" author of his stories (even those which he himself adapted) makes it possible for even audiences of non-academics to understand the changes made by adaptations. To take another example from twentieth-century drama, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* draws upon the traits of absurdist drama to give a parody of *Hamlet* that relies on an audience's understanding of the changes that Stoppard makes. Shakespeare's universality makes him a control where by variations of interpretation can be studied, because all branch from the same unchanging source text. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is not an attempt at "replacing" or "improving" upon Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Instead, it is a complex metafictional drama that is enhanced by the audience's knowledge of Shakespeare's text; as June Schlueter notes, "their entire time...is overshadowed by our knowledge that they are Shakespeare's, and not Stoppard's" (103). As Helene Keyssar-Franke notes:

The knowledge which the spectator brings to the theatre seems to me more important for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* than for many plays, but Stoppard's strategy does not presume an exceptionally sophisticated audience. He does presume that *Hamlet* has a mythical place in our culture and will therefore function for an audience in much the same way that the tales of the gods did for a Greek audience. (Keyssar-Franke, 88)

Shakespeare's plays function as contemporary myths that can be made or unmade by authors with the expectation that audiences will understand their changes. Because the audience will recognize a change in perspective, an alteration to the plot, or the introduction of information that is not present in Shakespeare's texts, authors can actually use these changes to communicate with the audience through Shakespeare.

'Displacing' authors such as Feinstein and Stoppard use an audience's foreknowledge of the Shakespearean source texts to establish a 'creative dissonance' that articulates their own political and social agendas. I take the idea of dissonance from Leon Festinger's 1957 text *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, which explores the "psychological discomfort" that arises from holding contradictory ideas or behaving in ways that are "inconsistent" with one's beliefs (2). Festinger argues that once an individual recognizes that these ideas are inconsistent, the brain takes steps to resolve or justify this conflict in order to relieve that discomfort. The idea that someone cannot hold two different meanings simultaneously comes back to Iser's discussion of "double meanings" in *As You Like It*. Iser explains that the different spoken and unspoken meanings in the play inspire an attempt to "bridge difference" through representation because "difference, then, inspires the attempt to remove it" (Iser, 126-7). Both Festinger's cognitive dissonances and Iser's double meanings hinge on the idea that difference (or dissonance) "is a continual propellant for its own removal" (Iser 126); holding two contradictory ideas simultaneously is uncomfortable. But authors who seek to 'displace' Shakespeare do not establish a dissonance that must be removed or resolved. Instead, the 'creative dissonance' used in displacement texts is crucial to understanding the adaptation.

The knowledge of *Hamlet* that an audience brings to a performance of Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* highlights the inconsistencies between the adaptation and the source text. In the case of parodic texts such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the differences between the remembered source text and the unexpectedly altered adaptation are actually crucial to understanding and enjoying the adaptation. The dissonance function as "comic incongruity," which "may contrast the original text with its new form or context by the comic means of contrasting the serious with the absurd as well as the 'high' with the 'low,' or the ancient with the modern, the pious with the impious, and so on" (Rose 33). A knowledgeable audience will watch the new play while recalling Shakespeare's text, simultaneously experiencing contrasting versions of the same story and noticing what has changed and what remains the same.

To take another example from avant-garde revisions of the early twentieth century, Bertolt Brecht's adaptation of *Coriolanus* hinges on both the imitation and the alteration of Shakespeare. Antony Tatlow argues that Brecht's text "appears to change Shakespeare and take sides with the plebeians, but it is also a reading of Shakespeare" (182). Brecht adopts the dissatisfied chorus of the plebeians as evidence that *Coriolanus* is a revolutionary play, but alters the ending to condemn the character of Coriolanus rather than glorifying him through Aufidius' eulogy as Shakespeare does. In Brecht's version, Shakespeare's text is both repeated and displaced—and the adjustments that Brecht makes stand out against the similarities. These contrasting elements, the "ironic inversions" in the repetition, call the audience's attention to particular moments in the texts that illustrate the literary and cultural ideas of both the adapting and adapted authors.

The subversive nature of Ionesco's *Macbeth* is similarly conveyed both by the appropriation and the rejection of elements from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Curtis Perry notes that Ionesco's *Macbeth* "elaborates on Shakespeare's suggestion that rebellion and tyranny may be part of an endless cycle of political violence" (85). I believe, however, that Ionesco's use of repetition to demonstrate the cyclical nature of revolution is actually his most significant departure from Shakespeare's text. While the darkness and violence of Ionesco's adaptation have their origins in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* eases the anxiety that the audience might feel at Macbeth's precipitous rise and fall by emphasizing the noble natures and destinies of the characters of Banquo and Malcolm. Ionesco, by contrast, strips away the audience's defenses and increases their sense of unease throughout the play as they do, indeed, see "a cycle of endless violence (Curtis, 85). By destroying the comparatively comforting conclusion of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and replacing it with repeated tirades of rebellion and soldiers who are anonymous and interchangeable in bloody battles, Ionesco not only illustrates the cycle of violence, but also a continuous cycle of oppression and corruption. Through this use of nihilistic repetition, Ionesco not only challenges the typical linear progression of a performed script, but he also forces the audience out of the zone of moral comfort with his disheartening political implications.

Shakespearean influences abound in avant-garde theatrical presentations, and the list of authors, movements, or theatrical groups who have adapted his plays is as lengthy as it is varied. Although Shakespeare's plays have almost none of the characteristics of the theater of the absurd as first defined by Martin Esslin in 1961, "some scholars have argued that Shakespeare is our contemporary in his recognition that the human situation

is absurd” (*Encyclopedia of World Drama* 706). In an interview, Ionesco maintains that Shakespeare is “the forefather of the theatre of the absurd. He said it all, and said it a long time ago” (Bonney qtd. in Perry 85). These movements, whose leaders at times embraced Shakespeare as a precursor even as they emphasized the differences between their work and his, made the subversive use of Shakespeare a more powerful and acceptable form of expression. Authors such as Ionesco, Brecht, and Stoppard contributed to establishing the trend in displacing Shakespeare that I address in the rest of my dissertation.

My focus is on twentieth-century playwrights whose appropriations of Shakespeare’s ‘marginalized’ characters address the theoretical debates of feminist and postcolonial criticism in a theatrical setting. Like the avant-garde theatrical adaptations discussed above, the “displacement” texts in the following chapters use Shakespeare subversively, both relying on the authoritative reputation of his plays and using those plays as a critical space to question dominant modes of authority. In describing the connections between the literary criticism of “women, colonized people, homosexuals and others” Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin emphasize that:

The decentering of the human subject was important to all of them because such a subject had been theorized by European imperialist discourses as white and male. Again, various oppositional movements (particularly anti-colonial and feminist struggles) as well as the new critical perspectives have all emphasized culture and literature as a site of conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed. (2-3)

Just as postcolonial and feminist critics talk back to their oppressors in criticism of Shakespeare, the playwrights I study “decenter the human subject” in a creative format by revising Shakespeare’s plots and characters. In an exploration of the ways that

Shakespeare has been adapted to speak to feminist and postcolonial concerns, the following chapters examine playwrights who ‘liberate’ Shakespeare’s characters from their texts and place them at the center of new dramas. I argue that Shakespearean adaptations are intriguing works of meta-fiction that blur the lines between literature and criticism and function as commentaries on authorial agency and individual autonomy.

The first section of the dissertation covers adaptations that focus specifically on Shakespeare’s female characters. The second examines adaptations of Shakespeare’s cultural ‘others’—Othello, Shylock, and Caliban. Each section begins with an introductory chapter that traces the history of these characters in adaptation, pairing brief discussions of individual texts, including novels, stories, plays, burlesques, and operas with relevant criticism and performance history. In these introductory sections, I emphasize the shifts in the treatment of these characters with the rise of feminist and postcolonial criticism in the twentieth century. In both sections, I follow the introduction with two shorter chapters, each exploring a single text in detail.

The introduction to my first section explains that authors have been using Shakespeare’s characters to reexamine the roles of women since John Fletcher’s sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* in the early 1600s. Rewriting Shakespeare’s women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries frequently included praise for female virtue and instruction on female behavior. In the twentieth-century, however, authors began transforming Shakespeare’s female characters into relatable symbols of what is problematic and possible for women in the twentieth century. A few female characters who have been dismissed as villainous (such as Goneril and Regan) or weak (such as Gertrude) are given ready excuses for their actions in these new texts. The most dramatic



shifts, however, came in the portrayals of the doomed ingénues of the tragedies; Desdemona, Juliet, Cordelia, and Ophelia are rewritten as independent women who fight against the constraints of their cultures. As an introduction to the section on feminism in Shakespearean appropriation, I examine plays, novels, and stories that use Shakespeare's female characters to explore issues of gender and resistance in literature and society.

In the rest of the first section, I closely examine the treatment that Shakespeare's female characters receive in two theatrical appropriations from the 1990s: Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*. In these plays, which explore female agency in societies and texts that are dominated by male characters, appropriating characters from a Shakespearean source text becomes a way to "talk back" to interpretations of the female role, both in Shakespeare and twentieth-century North America. By turning tragedy into comedy, MacDonald's text allows the doomed heroines Desdemona and Juliet to escape the prisons of their storylines and take an active role in their own fates. Vogel chooses instead to draw attention to the plights of women past and present by illustrating that characters such as Desdemona and Emilia cannot break free of constraints of their text or their society. Through these two chapters, I argue that Vogel and MacDonald present characters such as Desdemona as representations of female passivity that must be examined and challenged by contemporary audiences as they look at women's roles today.

My second section begins by tracing perceptions of otherness through appropriations of Shakespearean characters that the plays have historically problematized, such as Caliban, Othello, and Shylock. Before the rise of postcolonial

criticism, these Shakespearean others were alternately demonized or normalized by authors who rewrote Shakespeare's texts to fit the tastes and styles of their own times. With the rise of postcolonial criticism and a desire to hear the subaltern speak, these 'othered' characters undergo a sea change and emerge with clear cultural contexts and strong new voices. Before the 1960s, Othello's racial 'otherness' is caricatured in burlesque and minimized in opera and theater; afterwards, critics and adapters of Othello embrace his cultural identity and even condemn his character for choosing to pursue Desdemona's 'whiteness.' Similarly, Shylock is transformed from a one-dimensional villain composed of anti-Semitic stereotypes to a sympathetic character whose past is rooted in a strong cultural tradition and whose role in the trial in *The Merchant of Venice* must be carefully explained, if not justified. Caliban, who is represented as a sub-human representation of human iniquity in early adaptations of *The Tempest*, becomes the human embodiment of postcolonial resistance in novels and plays that rework the character after the 1950s. These transformations of Shakespearean character-identities do not simply reflect the changing interpretations of Shakespearean readers and audiences. The authors I study take an active role in rewriting the dialogues of class, religion, and race in their respective cultures, using Shakespeare's characters to pursue an agenda of social change.

Taking my general discussion of otherness to specific studies of two revisions of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the following two chapters explore the treatment of postcolonial ideas in Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* and Raquel Carrió's *Otra Tempestad*. Authors such as Césaire and Carrió go beyond the critical language linking Prospero with the colonizer and Caliban with the colonized, allowing these characters to step outside

their Shakespearean plot and act out their own postcolonial dramas. Césaire's *Une Tempête*, published in 1969, challenges colonial readings of the play by presenting Caliban as a heroic figure with an African heritage and an affinity for nature who resists Prospero's dangerous and unstable regime. Writing nearly thirty years after Césaire, Raquel Carrió moves away from the strict binaries that inform *Une Tempête* by emphasizing the hybrid cultures that are created as the conquerors and the conquered merge to form one society. Carrió's play, written and first performed in Cuba, has not yet been translated into English, and I am the first Shakespearean scholar to examine the play in detail. The contrast between the straightforward adversarial relationship portrayed in Césaire's text and the chaotic amalgam presented by Carrió is indicative of the shifts made in discourse on postcolonialism, globalization, and cosmopolitanism.

In examining feminism and postcolonialism in appropriations of Shakespeare, my argument is not limited to the idea of influence. As I will address in the coming chapters, authors such as MacDonald and Vogel might have been influenced by feminist criticism of *Othello*, just as Césaire and Carrió might demonstrate an understanding of postcolonial criticism of *The Tempest*. But in addition to using criticism, these authors are producing their own critical responses in dramatic form by directly addressing critical concerns in a creative format. Guido Almansi explains:

The serpentine developments of some of the characters devised by Shakespeare—himself the most captious of rewriters—require them to put on new masks and adopt different idioms according to the ideological standpoint of their various interpreters and rewriters; and this in turn provides an interesting clue to the twists and changes of European culture since the sixteenth century. (88)

Like the European “Shakespeare avatars” described by Almansi, the North and South American revisions in this dissertation are linked to the ideologies of their authors and the times in which they were (re)written. Césaire’s reinterpretation of Caliban is inextricably tied to his own ideas about postcolonialism and negritude. Vogel’s “dark and depressing” look at Desdemona comes from her own blend of “feminism” and “negative empathy” (Vogel, qtd in Holmberg). These authors reflect and shape changing attitudes to Shakespeare’s plays in their own times and locations.

Martha Tuck Rozett calls attention to this timeliness as a possible weakness in the adaptation process, asking “As these works question Shakespeare’s timebound assumptions about race, gender, politics, or psychologically probable behavior, are they, in Michael Dobson’s words, ‘every bit as historically contingent and socially invested’ as the Shakespeare they seek to unsettle?” (9). Later in her book, Rozett criticizes Joseph Papp’s 1968 *‘Naked’ Hamlet* for being “time-bound,” arguing that “readers of the nineties may feel that Shakespeare is their contemporary, but not Ramon the Puerto Rican Janitor [one of the disguises of Papp’s Hamlet]” (118). I do not see the “timebound” nature of Shakespearean adaptation as a flaw. I believe it proves that adaptation serves as a credible way of understanding Shakespeare’s cultural reception.

I take my title, “Chronicles of Our Time,” from a line spoken by Shakespeare’s Hamlet. At the arrival of the players, Hamlet says:

Good my lord, will you see the players well  
bestowed? Do you hear, let them be well used; for  
they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the  
time... (II.ii.522-4)

I argue that response texts are actually crucial to understanding how a generation explores and resolves the problems of Shakespeare's texts. Rather than dismiss adaptation as unable to "improve" upon Shakespeare, I examine Shakespearean appropriation as a relevant form of literary and social discourse. As these playwrights use Shakespeare's characters to reflect and shape the critical arguments of their own times, their plays can be used to determine not only how these writers perceive Shakespeare, but how they perceive themselves. Like theory and criticism of Shakespeare's plays, the response texts I study in this dissertation find ways of interpreting Shakespeare that resonate with current readers and audiences. In his introduction to *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, Martin Esslin explain that "to see the contemporary in the timeless, to be able to hold up immortal plays as mirrors for his own time—that is surely the noblest function of a critic" (xx). In their works of creative criticism, MacDonald, Vogel, Césaire, and Carrió take on this "noblest function," using Shakespeare in their own plays to establish "mirrors" for their own times. Like the players in Hamlet's speech, these playwrights serve as "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time," revealing the ideals and biases of a particular cultural moment.

## SECTION II

### GENDER AND RESISTANCE IN FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

#### INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's female characters have been analyzed and rewritten since their plays were first performed, but interpretations (and appropriations) of these characters changed with the advent of feminist criticism in the 1970's, when "teachers and students began asking new questions about Shakespeare" (Dusinberre, ix). In this section, I will examine the ways that the questions asked by feminist criticism of Shakespeare are taken up by late-twentieth century playwrights in a form of performative literary criticism. In these plays, which explore female agency in societies and texts that are dominated by male characters, appropriating characters from a Shakespearean source text is a way to "talk back" to literary criticism of Shakespeare's female characters. These feminist appropriations of Shakespeare's characters do not necessarily criticize Shakespeare's portrayal of women. On the contrary, they use well-known Shakespearean characters to explore gender and resistance in Shakespeare's time and their own.

The texts that I explore in this section use creative techniques to transform Shakespeare's female characters, commenting critically both on Shakespeare plays and on their history of critical interpretation. These texts are closely tied to literary criticism, both by asking critical questions and answering them. Plays such as Paula Vogel's

*Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* are very much products of their times. Like feminist critics, Vogel and MacDonald approach the texts of Shakespeare's plays with a new tone, challenging and questioning previous critics and even the Shakespearean texts themselves. Juliet Dusinberre describes her book *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, which is almost universally acknowledged as the first full-length feminist interpretation of the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, as "that original battle-cry" written in "blood, my blood, a woman's blood" (xxxiv). Similarly, the texts that I will examine in this section are about fighting as much as they are about writing and reading; they are fictional battle-cries, echoing and responding to the critical battle-cries of the first feminist critics of Shakespeare by transforming Shakespeare's female characters.

Criticism by women (and about women) written before the twentieth century chronicles a different sort of battle, one which is reflected in transformations of Shakespeare's plays from before the 1970's. For many nineteenth-century women, their writings argue that the "manly book" of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* could, and even should, be read by women (Lamb, qtd in Thompson and Roberts 2). If much of feminist criticism is devoted to 'reclaiming' Shakespeare from male critics, women's early considerations of Shakespeare seem equally concerned with carving out a space for women as readers and performers of Shakespeare. It would be inaccurate to describe all of these early female critics of Shakespeare's women as 'early feminists;' in fact, several women who wrote about Shakespeare took pains to separate their writing from the scholarly writings of men. In her preface to *The Stratford Gallery*, Henrietta Palmer distances herself from Shakespeare's "wise and faithful scholars and expounders"

(Palmer, qtd in Thompson and Roberts, 110). In her portrait of Kate from *The Taming of the Shrew*, Palmer argues that “no one outside of the dangerous circle of Woman’s Rights can possibly find fault” with Kate’s final speech of submission (Palmer, qtd in Thompson and Roberts, 114). But the efforts these writers made to consider female readers and female characters of Shakespeare helped to lay the groundwork for the creative and critical feminist texts that consider Shakespeare’s women.

Early considerations of Shakespearean heroines often seem to echo Hamlet’s questions of Ophelia: “Are you honest?...Are you fair?” (III.i.104-106). One of the primary questions of pre-feminist criticism is ‘is she virtuous?’ Early critics are concerned with the honesty and integrity of these women, particularly in relation to the men in their lives. Pre-feminist critical texts considering tragic female characters such as Gertrude, Ophelia, and Cordelia usually focus on the ways that they succeed or fail in the roles of mother, lover, or daughter. Authors such as A.C. Bradley and J. Dover Wilson suggest Gertrude’s corruption or weakness by maintaining that she is an adulteress. When remembering the teaching of Shakespeare critic Dorothea Beale, Elizabeth Raikes reports that “Ophelia...was for all the generations of girls who read *Hamlet* at Cheltenham the woman who failed a man because she could not dare to be true” (Raikes, qtd in Thompson and Roberts, 138). Emma Lazarus describes Cordelia’s speech about divided duty as “a rebuff discourteous and irreverent enough to affront even a modern and non-royal father,” (Lazarus, qtd in Thompson and Roberts, 158). Charlotte Porter defends Cordelia against this assertion, characterizing Cordelia as “reserved and self-respecting” and her speech as filled with “obstinate uncompromising honor” (Porter, qtd in Thompson and Roberts, 161). These critics, both male and female, frequently disagree



about whether these characters are virtuous and honest, but it remains their central concern. There is little question that discovering and judging a female character's virtue, particularly in her relations with the male characters in the play, was considered a worthwhile critical venture.

Early criticism of these women frequently includes lists of the characters' vices and virtues, and female characters are often evaluated in comparison to an "ideal virtuous woman." Grace Latham describes Viola as:

The ideal woman that almost every great writer has attempted to pourtray [sic] under various names and in different circumstances; but only Shakespeare has been able to perceive the qualities which compose it, the springs which move it, and to reproduce the exquisite charm of Viola's perfect womanhood, which affects us like a sweet harmony or a delicate perfume. (qtd in Thompson and Roberts, 117)

Henrietta Palmer's *The Stratford Gallery; or The Shakespeare Sisterhood: Comprising Forty-Five Ideal Portraits*, published in 1859, evaluates the relative faults and merits of many of Shakespeare's most prominent female characters. Palmer's work received early praise, but not for its academic merits. A review in *Atlantic Monthly* explains that (as a woman), Palmer has unique insight into the emotions that guide the behavior of Shakespeare's women: "It would not be strange if womanly instinct were to prove oftentimes a truer guide in following the waywardness of a woman's nature than the cold, logical processes of merely intellectual men" (qtd in Thompson and Roberts, 110). In Palmer's portraits, Portia's cleverness and Hero's "modest, graceful excellence" are praised, while Beatrice's "gratuitous impertinence and unseemly forwardness" serve as evidence "that the 'fast' woman is by no means a modern 'institution'" (qtd in Thompson and Roberts, 111-2). Included in many of these descriptions of Shakespeare's 'ideal'

women are passionate defenses of Shakespeare for having the ability to craft such perfect women, but it is hard to find any critics of the time who question exactly what an ‘ideal’ female character should be. The need to classify Shakespeare’s women as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (with corresponding odes, defenses, and indictments) is reflected in pre-feminist adaptations and transformations of Shakespeare’s plays.

Shakespearean transformations have existed since the early modern period, in various incarnations. Shakespeare provided inspiration for several authors to produce prequels or sequels to his plays. These early sequels and prequels occupy a transitional space between texts that replace Shakespeare and texts that displace. Rather than override any familiarity with Shakespeare as Davenant and Tate do in their plays, these transformations assume an audience’s knowledge of Shakespeare’s plays. But they do not rely on dissonance or ironic inversion to de-center Shakespeare the way that so many twentieth-century authors do. Shakespeare remains very much centered, with the adaptations taking on a supporting role. In transforming Shakespeare’s texts by writing prequels and sequels, these authors sought to add to a reader’s understanding of Shakespeare’s female characters. Because the key questions that early readers had about Shakespeare’s female characters focused on whether or not the characters were honest or virtuous, the adaptations frequently took on the same characteristics of praise or denigration that early criticism did.

The earliest known transformation<sup>3</sup> of a Shakespearean play is *The Woman’s Prize; or the Tamer Tamed*, written in 1611 by Shakespeare’s collaborator and successor John Fletcher. As a sequel to Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, Fletcher’s play has

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<sup>3</sup> *The Tamer Tamed* is described as a “spinoff” by Charles Squier (qtd. in Fischlin and Fortier, 23).

a great deal in common with the recent feminist transformations that I will examine later in this section. Like these later plays, *The Tamer Tamed* is guided by a “calculated intertextual glance [which] comments on, rewrites, and undermines the ideological assumptions in Shakespeare’s play” (Molly Easo Smith, qtd. in Fischlin and Fortier, 23). Mark Fortier and Daniel Fischlin call attention to the way that the women of *The Tamer Tamed* “band together” whereas “the women in *The Taming of the Shrew*—particularly Katherine—are much more isolated from each other” (23). As Gordon McMullen argues in his introduction to *The Tamer Tamed*, the witty wives of Padua are able to succeed in taming the man who tames Katherine because “it is female collective action that the men are most afraid of” (xvi). McMullen argues that “their worst fears are embodied in the marvelously anarchic procession of city and country women who come to stand shoulder to shoulder with Maria” (xvi). This complex and multifaceted exploration of the interactions between women is the first of many critical and artistic studies of female interactions in Shakespeare. Fletcher also chooses to set *The Tamer Tamed* in London rather than Padua (the setting for *The Taming of the Shrew*); in doing so he creates a play that is far closer to the genre of ‘city comedy’ than any of Shakespeare’s plays, thus beginning a long tradition of authors who re-work Shakespeare’s plays in a new style or genre.

While *The Tamer Tamed* does offer the kind of performative commentary on Shakespeare that is significantly absent from Shakespearean adaptations before the twentieth century, the decision not to rewrite Shakespeare’s heroine sets it apart from the plays that I will examine later in the chapter. Fletcher does not use the tempestuous interactions between Shakespeare’s Petruchio and Kate as a starting point for the story of

Petruchio's taming; when his play begins, Kate is dead and about to be replaced by a Petruchio's second wife, Maria. Rather than exploring Katherine's point of view more thoroughly or allowing her to break free of her restricting text and complicated marriage, Fletcher instead dismisses Shakespeare's heroine from his text and his interpretation almost completely. Kate is mentioned a few times at the beginning of the play, but *The Tamer Tamed* is truly Petruchio's story and Maria's. Katherine's story has ended (and ended badly—her 'taming' was apparently not as complete as Shakespeare's text would have its audience believe), and Fletcher begins anew, crafting a better, more fitting wife for Petruchio. Katherine and Petruchio come to symbolize the 'bad' marriage, while Maria and Petruchio are established as a 'good' marriage. When enumerating the plays's strengths, Gordon McMullan notes that "above all, it offers us Maria...a resolute, witty woman and a series of tricks that profoundly challenge our assumptions about Jacobean society" (xvii). Just as pre-feminist critics of Shakespeare focus on whether or not the 'ideal woman' exists in Shakespeare's plays, Fletcher finds a way of inserting his perfect heroine directly into the plot of a Shakespeare play. Fletcher 'fixes' Shakespeare's *Taming* by creating an ideal wife, a new 'tamer,' who assertively criticizes the actions of both Kate and Petruchio in Shakespeare's play. Fletcher presents her actions in *Tamer* as an example to couples everywhere. While this play begins to examine the idea of female agency in Shakespeare's plays, the voice of Shakespeare's female heroine remains conspicuously silenced.

*The Tamer Tamed* is one of only a few plays written before the twentieth century that sought to transform Shakespeare's characters themselves, using the audience's familiarity with Shakespeare to explore certain stories beyond the texts. Like *The Tamer*

*Tamed*, however, these new plays belonged almost entirely to the male characters in the Shakespearean source texts. Characters such as Falstaff, Shylock, and Caliban caught the imaginations of playwrights from Shakespeare's time until the late 1800's, inspiring dramatic sequels, prequels, and new stories. Before 1900, playwrights did not seem compelled to explore the female perspective of these stories beyond what was already in Shakespeare's texts. The only authors to expand the female roles were writing to replace Shakespeare's plays, not to interpret them. For example, Nahum Tate's *King Lear* (discussed extensively in the introduction) expands Cordelia's role. By giving Cordelia a romantic relationship with Edgar and allowing her to live at the end of the play, Tate gives an indirect criticism of Shakespeare's treatment of his heroine (as opposed to the more direct criticism found in twentieth-century adaptations). Similarly, Dryden and Davenant add to Miranda's role in *The Enchanted Island* (and give her a sister), but her expanded scenes do little to shed light on Shakespeare's Miranda. Even after female actresses such as Helena Faucit had made roles such as Rosalind, Ophelia, Viola, and Desdemona legendary and critics began examining Shakespeare's heroines in books and essays, playwrights were less inclined to create new plays exploring these characters until the twentieth century.

Shakespeare's women did, however, capture the imaginations of a few female writers who were able to explore the inner workings of the minds of Shakespeare's women in an entirely different medium: prose. Female authors such as Mary Cowden Clarke and Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman chose to shift the stories of Shakespeare's heroines from the stage to the page, creating Shakespearean prequels in novels and stories. Mary Cowden Clarke's volume of short stories *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's*

*Heroines* (1850) introduced young readers to the childhood lives of fifteen of Shakespeare's heroines, including Portia, Desdemona, and Ophelia. Cowden Clarke's version of *Hamlet*, entitled "Ophelia, the Rose of Elsinore," traces Ophelia's childhood from her birth to Laertes' departure for France. Her audiences were Victorian girls who had not yet read Shakespeare's plays, but who might be persuaded to do so by reading about his heroines in her book, and Cowden Clarke used her stories to educate her readers about Shakespeare and the morals of their own time. Cowden Clarke emphasized the purity and innocence of the young Ophelia, particularly in contrast to her more worldly older friends. In Mary Cowden Clarke's story, it is clear that Ophelia's extreme sensitivity and her tragic circumstances will eventually lead to her death, but that her chaste sweetness is an admirable characteristic that readers would do well to emulate.

Ophelia's experiences growing up in Denmark serve as a way for Cowden Clark to introduce young readers to the dangers of seduction. While Ophelia is the epitome of chaste innocence throughout the story, she sees two of her closest friends seduced by the same cruel and charming nobleman. Although Ophelia does not entirely understand the progression of events due to her youth and innocence, she is shocked and terrified when one friend, the daughter of her nurse, dies in childbirth after being shunned by her family. Years later, Ophelia experiences similar horror when she discovers the body of her best friend, who has hanged herself after being abandoned by the same man. While the detailed description of a young girl's encounter with two dead bodies hardly seems an appropriate subject for children's literature in Victorian England, Cowden Clarke takes great pains to describe the experiences of Ophelia's friends Jutha and Thyra as cautionary tales for young women. Through the examples of the two young women in Ophelia's

story, who mirror the many other “fallen women” that show up in the other stories of *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines*, Cowden Clarke is able to model the painful (and even fatal) consequences of not protecting one’s chastity.

Wyman’s prequel to *Hamlet*, entitled *Gertrude of Denmark* (1913), tells Gertrude’s story “as though [Shakespeare was] an absolutely true historical narrative, but one with which I had not the historical novelist’s privilege to tamper” (Wyman qtd in Rozett 73). Wyman’s Gertrude never moves beyond her role as mother, and her behavior in the novel never deviates from the actions of Shakespeare’s Gertrude. Wyman simply gives Gertrude a backstory and provides narration of the thoughts that might have crossed Gertrude’s mind at different points in Shakespeare’s play. At Ophelia’s death, Gertrude realizes that “she had lived among conventions, she had thought the thoughts which courtiers, princes, and abbesses had taught her to think. She had not possessed the intellect which would have enabled her to unthink them” (qtd in Rozett 84). But her character still does not speak out, question Claudius, confide in Hamlet—she remains largely oblivious to what is “rotten” in the state of Denmark until she drinks the poisoned wine. In her last living moments, “some sort of awareness came to her...then a mother died” (qtd in Rozett 85). Both Cowden Clarke and Wyman present idealized interpretations of their characters, tying the Ophelia and Gertrude to the Victorian models of the perfect child or the perfect mother, but neither of them does so by presenting significant alterations in Shakespeare’s text.

Wyman’s text remains especially faithful to her Shakespearean source. Martha Tuck Rozett explains:

[Wyman’s] Gertrude never becomes a heroine who invites the reader’s

profound sympathy and admiration, partly because she remains constrained by Wyman's decision not to add extensively to or alter the words Shakespeare gave her. Wyman imposed a very restrictive set of rules upon her enterprise, for she viewed herself as an interpreter who "had no right to alter [the play] in order to harmonize with my fancies." (Rozett 88)

Both Cowden Clarke and Wyman present their texts as additional information about Shakespeare's female characters rather than a dissonant, challenging "response text." While they do not technically attempt to replace Shakespeare's plays, their additions to Shakespeare's stories do not effectively displace their source texts either. By providing a plausible internal monologue and personal history for Shakespeare's female characters, authors such as Cowden Clarke and Wyman serve as evidence of "the widespread intensity with which the autonomous literary character was believed in" (Aurbach qtd in Rozett 78). Like feminist appropriations of Shakespeare's female characters, these texts serve as barometers that indicate the ways that Shakespeare's characters are received in their time. The approaches of Cowden Clarke and Wyman have much in common with the work of critics such as A. C. Bradley, whose *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) treats Shakespeare's characters as though questions about their off-stage life could be answered.

The prose transformations of Lillie Buffum Chase Wyman and Mary Cowden Clarke came long before feminist criticism of Shakespeare's plays, but their use of prose to target a female audience for adaptations of Shakespeare has been adopted by authors of Shakespearean transformations in the twentieth century and beyond. Although the focus of my dissertation is on theatrical transformations of Shakespeare, it is important to consider feminist prose transformations of Shakespeare's plays to better understand the



trends of feminist adaptation since the 1970's. The young adult novels *Ophelia* and *Dating Hamlet*, written by Lisa Klein and Lisa Fiedler, target a younger audience with the story of a Shakespearean heroine, much as Mary Cowden Clarke does in her *Girlhoods of Shakespeare's Heroines*. These novels, which offer information about Ophelia's background and position in the court before the beginning of *Hamlet*, are somewhat reminiscent of Mary Cowden Clarke's "Ophelia: The Rose of Elsinore." Their texts do not adhere as closely to Shakespeare as Mary Cowden Clarke's does, however. Klein and Fiedler both alter the character of Ophelia, presenting her as a survivor rather than a victim. Novels such as John Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius* and stories such as Margaret Atwood's "Gertrude Talks Back" explore Gertrude's roles as wife and mother as Wyman's text does, but the content of their stories undermines traditional interpretations of Shakespeare's Gertrude rather than reinforcing them. Like the plays I will examine in the following chapters, these works of prose have their origins in the transformations of Shakespeare's plays that were written before the twentieth century, but the way that these new texts raise questions about the nature of women and their positions in their texts and societies could have only come from an environment with feminist influences.

The feminist environment that produced these texts has had a complex relationship with the plays of Shakespeare. Shakespearean feminism began with texts like Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* with its "battle-cry: Shakespeare the feminist" (xxxiv). Karen Newman sums up the conclusions of this early feminist criticism by stating, "according to this view, Shakespeare managed, despite his patriarchal culture and ostensibly because of his genius, to represent women acting

powerfully, breaking the bonds imposed by a male-governed hierarchy” (601). While early feminist critics such as Dusiinberre acknowledge that their work could be characterized as full of “anger” and “aggression,” it is rare in early feminist criticism to see such anger directed at Shakespeare’s plays themselves (xi). The editors of *The Woman’s Part* state clearly that “stereotypes” that they seek to overthrow do not come directly from Shakespeare, but from other literary criticism of Shakespeare; for them, feminist criticism is about reexamining Shakespeare’s plays, not correcting or denouncing them. At the end of the introduction, they argue that “feminist critics of Shakespeare seek to recover a truer sense of women’s parts and of men’s. Enlarging our conception of the relations between men and women in Shakespeare, we enlarge our conceptions of the plays, ourselves, and of others” (Greene, Neely, and Lenz, 14). In many ways, this era of feminist criticism of Shakespeare is driven by a desire to reclaim Shakespeare from the male critical tradition—to mark Shakespeare as proto-feminist by interpreting and defending his plays and asking questions about the strength of his female characters.

Unlike the “first wave” feminist critics of Shakespeare, some feminist critics in the 1980’s take a harsher look at Shakespeare, charging him with misogyny and criticizing him for being a product of his time. They dismiss the positive conclusions of earlier feminist criticism of Shakespeare as “wish fulfillment,” bidding “farewell to Shakespeare as a poet who transcended his age” (Newman 601). This criticism is concerned with the restrictive patriarchal structures that are present in Shakespeare’s texts. Kathleen McLuskie, one of the most prominent critics of this period, maintains that “feminist criticism must also assert the power of resistance, subverting rather than co-

opting the domination of the patriarchal Bard” (106). McLuskie ‘resists’ this domination not by arguing that women such as Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan are feminist heroes, but by claiming that they reinforce stereotypes—Goneril and Regan as chaotic forces, and Cordelia as restoring the patriarchal order. Although the earlier optimism about Shakespeare’s portrayal of women does not disappear from criticism since the beginning of the 1980’s, it is frequently tempered with an edge of pragmatism. The strength of some of Shakespeare’s women is still acknowledged by these critics, but the harsh limitations of their positions in society, particularly in the tragedies and histories, are emphasized to put that strength in perspective. Claire McEachern asserts that, “for these critics, Shakespeare is not free of his culture, but locked within it, its collaborator...an early modern author incapable of subverting patriarchal structures” (270). By calling attention to the marginalization of Shakespeare’s women, critics such as McLuskie create a space for adaptations of Shakespeare that reinforce or defy the marginalization and restrictions they describe.

The 1990s and 2000s saw an explosion of feminist transformations of Shakespeare’s texts highlighting tensions between female position and female possibility both in and out of Shakespeare’s texts. The positive interpretations of Shakespearean heroines in early feminist criticism is carried even further by some appropriations—tragic women become comic heroes, triumphing where their Shakespearean counterparts fail. In analyzing the ways that Shakespeare’s female characters are ‘trapped’ in their oppressive societies and tragic texts, later feminist critics illustrate the possibility of liberating these characters, which these authors explore further in their own creative texts. Feminist criticism, which calls attention to the ‘silencing’ of female characters, opens the door to

the idea that recent playwrights and novelists could rewrite these plays by giving Shakespeare's women their voices. Like earlier transformations of Shakespeare's plays, the texts I will examine in this section "take [their] shapes from the 'gaps' in Shakespeare (Fischlin and Fortier, 216). The authors of these new transformations, however, fill these gaps and silences with challenges, questions, and answers. By displacing Shakespeare and establishing dissonance with his plays and characters, authors of feminist transformations address the concerns of feminist critics in their own dramas. These texts express a desire to see Shakespearean heroines as powerful women created by a visionary author who was ahead of his time. But there is a corresponding need to communicate the limitations of the roles of women, both inside and outside of Shakespeare's plays. Blending the aggressive optimism of the first feminist Shakespearean criticism with the more pessimistic analysis of some of the criticism that followed, these authors create their own Shakespeares, which are as critical as they are creative.

The editors of *The Woman's Part*, one of the first anthologies of feminist criticism, categorize the articles in the collection by stating:

The critics in this volume liberate Shakespeare's women from the stereotypes to which they have too often been confined; they examine women's relations to each other; they analyze the nature and effects of patriarchal structures; and they explore the influence of genre on the portrayal of women. (Greene, Neely, and Lenz, 4)

In this section I will examine authors who use their texts to approach the same issues as the feminist critics described in the above passage. Through their theater and prose, they, too, seek to "liberate" Shakespeare's female characters, but in these works, Shakespeare's women are freed not only from their confining stereotypes—they are also released from the bonds of their texts. These authors give Shakespeare's women lives beyond their

texts, offering critical interpretations of the text through the transformations themselves. By rewriting Shakespeare's plays from new perspectives and making changes in the plots and characters, these authors, like the critics who came before them, comment on gender, genre, and patriarchal structures in Shakespeare's plays and in their own societies.

Because these texts emphasize the female characters above the male and the marginal above the center, feminist transformations of Shakespeare tend to shift the focus off of the main male characters. In the opening monologue of the Fool in *Lear's Daughters*, the cast is given as "three princesses, two servants, one king offstage" (217). Similarly, Othello never appears onstage in Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, and Hamlet is used sparingly in novels such as *Ophelia*, *Dating Hamlet*, and *Gertrude and Claudius*. The title characters in *Romeo and Juliet* are dead during the action of Sharman MacDonald's *After Juliet*, and, although their tragic deaths drive the action of the play, the focus is on Rosaline, a character who never appears in Shakespeare's play. While both Romeo and Othello make an appearance in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, the main character is Constance, a literary critic who is studying their texts, and her focus is on the heroines Desdemona and Juliet. While the male title characters often remain a powerful presence in these displacing response texts, their presence is usually indirect. Their impact is demonstrated through the words and actions of female characters, many of whom are marginalized in the original plays.

Rescuing these characters from the 'margins' of Shakespearean plays and criticism, the authors of feminist transformations give Shakespeare's women new voices that are informed by four centuries of questions and debate over the positions of women

past and present. In her discussion of “contemporary women’s re-visions in literature and performance,” Marianne Novy argues that all of the women discussed in the volume “have been touched by the feminist desire to imagine women as subjects and not simply as objects” (1). By giving these new voices to Shakespeare’s female characters, the authors that I will explore in this section are liberating the characters from the critical assumptions and audience stereotypes that define them as objects rather than subjects. In these texts, female authors, female characters, and female readers all enjoy an increased sense of agency as feminist ideas are explored and emphasized.

The texts that I will examine in this section transform some of the heroines who demonstrate only limited agency in their Shakespearean source texts, women whose position in society contributes to their suffering in their tragic texts. Ophelia is re-written as a tenacious and triumphant teenage role-model in young adult novels, while Gertrude gains new power and sexual confidence in the texts of Margaret Atwood and John Updike. Lear’s daughters step out of their father’s shadow, Juliet is considered separately from Romeo, and Desdemona breaks away from critical stereotypes. Characters such as Rosalind and Beatrice, who are almost universally praised by feminist critics for their intelligence and agency in their original texts, are conspicuously absent from feminist transformations, whose authors concentrate on giving voices to female characters that are harder to hear in their Shakespearean plays.

Elaine Showalter, in her examination of the history of Ophelia’s critical reception, argues that “to liberate Ophelia from the text, or to make her its tragic center, is to re-appropriate her for our own ends; to dissolve her into a female symbolism of absence is to endorse our own marginality” (79). With their creative criticism, the authors who re-

write Ophelia rescue her from this “marginality,” bringing her to the center of the text and unabashedly re-appropriating her for their own reasons. Even Lee Blessing, whose transformation *Fortinbras* is focused on its title character rather than Ophelia, enters into the critical debate about Ophelia’s position in the text. When Blessing’s Hamlet (as a ghost) tells the ghost of Ophelia that the tragic story of their deaths must be told, the ghost of Ophelia responds: “From whose point of view? Yours? Mr. Hamlet It’s-All-About-Me the Dane? Oh, sure—your point of view is clearly the most rewarding, the most complex. No wonder it has a special right to exist...*I will not be marginal!*” (51). In their young adult novels that re-tell *Hamlet* from Ophelia’s point of view, Lisa Fiedler and Lisa Klein bring Ophelia out of the margins and shift Hamlet into the position of a supporting character. These authors give Ophelia a strong voice of her own, reacting against interpretations of readers who label Ophelia as “a pretty, fragile, weak, stupid little inanity” (*The True Ophelia* 15). They portray her as a resourceful heroine who feigns madness and stages her own death in order to escape the corrupt and dangerous court of Elsinore. By reviving Ophelia for young adults, they re-create her as a powerful role model for teenage girls.

The prose transformations of Gertrude’s character by Margaret Atwood and John Updike do not use Gertrude the way that Klein and Fiedler use Ophelia, and they differ dramatically from the approach of Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman as well. Rather than whitewashing Gertrude’s character to make her a model wife and mother or allowing her to escape her tragic circumstances entirely, Atwood and Updike choose instead to explore Gertrude’s flaws and dissatisfactions. Titling her short story “Gertrude Talks Back” and presenting it as Gertrude’s response to Hamlet’s accusations during the closet scene,

Margaret Atwood gives Gertrude a wry, confident voice and invites the readers to share her guiltiest secrets. Atwood re-creates Gertrude as the unapologetic murderer of King Hamlet. Learning with surprise that Hamlet suspects Claudius, Atwood's Gertrude retorts:

Oh! You think *what*? You think Claudius murdered your Dad? Well, no wonder you've been so rude to him at the dinner table!  
If I'd known *that*, I could have put you straight in no time flat.  
It wasn't Claudius, darling.  
It was me. (18)

Her motive for the murder is simple; King Hamlet, though handsome, "wasn't a whole lot of fun" and found the joys of the flesh repugnant, which "was getting, well, very hard to live with" (16-7). Although this treatment of Gertrude seems to cast her in the role of the villain, her 'villainous' deeds present her as a character with more strength and agency than her Shakespearean counterpart. Atwood's Gertrude is greatly removed from the "very dull and very shallow" (qtd in Bamber, 77). character described by A. C. Bradley long before *Gertrude Talks Back* was written—she shows both power and passion in her sardonic confession.

John Updike's Gertrude from his novel *Gertrude and Claudius*, does not have the unapologetic villainous power that Atwood's does; she is weaker, kinder, and more aware of the limitations of her position as a woman in the Danish court than Atwood's Gertrude. But Updike, like Atwood, gives Gertrude a chance to express her unhappiness to a reader in a way that Shakespeare's Gertrude never does. While Updike does not give Gertrude the agency to change her fate the way that the young adult Ophelias of Klein and Fiedler do, his novel makes it clear that Gertrude's actions before the play of *Hamlet* opens, especially her affair with Claudius, are her own way of taking power and pleasure where



she can, in a court in which she has little authority of her own. *Gertrude and Claudius* is the story of both the title characters, but the Gerutha/Geruthe/Gertrude character is the focus of the novel, which follows her from her childhood until the first act of *Hamlet*. Updike does not allow his Gertrude to break free of the constraints of the plot of *Hamlet* any more than he allows her to truly break free of the restrictions of her position in the court, but he gives her a voice to consider her position, and he gives her actions that resist it.

Like Atwood and Updike, both Ann-Marie MacDonald and Paula Vogel bring the female heroines of the Shakespearean source plays to the forefront, taking the attention away from their male counterparts. In the following chapters, I will look closely at the ways that Vogel carves a distinctly female environment out of the plot of *Othello* by using only the characters of Desdemona, Bianca, and Emilia. The voices of these women are expanded and transformed in Vogel's play, and they are able to speak in their own defense over the off-stage silence of the male characters. While Ann-Marie MacDonald does include male characters onstage, she goes a step further than Vogel by allowing Desdemona and Juliet to not only share their voices as women, but also as literary critics, rejecting the derogatory judgments of earlier critics. By shifting the attention from the male characters to the female characters, the authors of these texts allow their readers and viewers a chance to change their perspectives, to consider a viewpoint that was previously limited or unavailable. Rather than completely defying patriarchal structures in their female-centric texts, these authors frequently use the female voices of Shakespeare's characters to call attention to their domination by their husbands, fathers, and lovers, illustrating their limiting positions in the texts in a performative literary

criticism.

Authors of feminist criticism “analyze the nature and effects of patriarchal structures” in Shakespeare’s texts, and authors of these feminist transformations work this analysis into the texts themselves (*The Woman’s Part* 4). They turn the perceived subtext of Shakespeare’s plays into the text of a new work. This technique is especially apparent in Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, in which Desdemona and Juliet both offer their own ‘literary’ criticism of their roles in their respective plays, with particular attention to their reactions to the male-dominated societies they live in. Similarly, Gertrude and Claudius dissect Hamlet’s character in John Updike’s novel, attributing his difficult nature either to his desire to live life as though he were an actor playing a part or for his guilt over his desire for his mother, and the two Ophelias consider Hamlet’s character from a different point of view in their respective young-adult novels. *Lear’s Daughters* offers an explanation for Cordelia’s silence, Regan’s sexual desires, and Goneril’s anger towards her father, and Rosaline of *After Juliet* gives a scathing interpretation of Juliet’s character. These texts comment on Shakespeare’s plots and characters even as they transform them to fit their own ends.

Through their female protagonists, these authors present feminist ideas about the controlling nature of patriarchal systems that move beyond commentary on Shakespeare’s plays as well. The re-written heroines of Shakespeare’s plays consider the roles of women carefully in their transformed texts, offering their own observations of the plight of their sex in ways that have more to do with the treatment of women in societies past and present than they do with the characters’ positions in Shakespeare’s plays. In *Lear’s Daughters*, Goneril and Regan speak about their coming marriages to Albany and

Cornwall with trepidation and disdain:

Regan: Do you want this marriage...?

Goneril: It's our job. It's what we're here for. To marry and breed.

Regan: Like dogs?

Goneril: Like dogs. Valuable merchandise. (229)

The commentary the two sisters offer on the subject of marriage and the worth of women does not seem particular to the characters and their Shakespearean source play; instead, it has a greater resonance for those who consider the politics and economics of marriage (particularly marriages in the upper classes) in the early modern period. John Updike's Gerutha (the Gertrude character as a child) ponders the roles of women in marriage in a similar way, arguing "no woman wants to be a mere piece of furniture, to be bartered for and then sat upon" before giving in to her father's demands that she marry the man that he has chosen for her (5). By writing about subjects such as arranged marriage in such explicit terms, these authors separate their characters from their settings briefly, allowing them to use the language of feminism *avant le lettre*.

These characters frequently offer defenses of women to the male characters in their stories. Both of the young-adult Ophelias tease their respective Hamlets for their misogynistic speeches. Klein's Ophelia enters into a debate with her Hamlet "like the noble ladies in Castiglione's Book of the Courtier," reproving him for his comments by stating "Lord Hamlet, it seems you see all women as deceivers, be they beautiful or ugly. Perhaps the fault lies in the man, who trusts only his sight and is a slave to his base desire" (56). Fiedler's Ophelia similarly objects to her Hamlet's opinions on the subject, cutting him off with "I prefer we talk not on your notions of frailty and women, sir. In fact, I warn thee—go not there" (63). These defenses, however, only come in

conversations between men and women; when the women converse together, the subject more frequently turns again to the limitations of the female position in a male-dominated society, and the possibilities of resistance.

Not all of the ways that these texts explore and question patriarchal structures come in the form of explicit statements made by the female protagonists, however. By placing their protagonists in an atmosphere of oppressive restriction and impending dangers at the hands of the men in the stories, these authors put an analysis of patriarchal power in the foundations of their texts. The *Hamlet* adaptations suggest that Denmark is more of a prison for the female characters than it is for Hamlet himself. In the young adult novels, both Ophelias grow up in a world of restrictions; their options for education are limited, their movements around the castle are closely watched, and their respective Poloniuses are even more controlling than the character is in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They are also both nearly raped by brutish and sadistic men of the court. Although the childhood of Gerutha, the Gertrude character in Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius*, is happier than those of the two Ophelias, her painfully restricted position as a woman is apparent early on in the text. As the only child of the Danish king, Gerutha is therefore "nearest to the throne," but that power is not her own; it is "to be assumed by the man to whom she would marry" (Updike, 7). For Horvendil, the King Hamlet character, she is not Gerutha—she is Denmark, to be claimed by marriage. Facing an unwanted arranged marriage, Gerutha comes to understand that "a good woman lay in the beds others had made for her and walked in the shoes others had cobbled" (Updike, 27). Despite the way that these re-written characters, particularly the Ophelias, speak up in support of the worth, capability, and intelligence of women, they remain constrained by the patriarchal

nature of the Danish court.

The patriarchal society of Verona is easier to defy in Sharman MacDonald's play *After Juliet*. In *Man's Estate*, Coppélia Kahn argues that in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* "the feud in a realistic social sense is the primary tragic force in the play—not the feud as agent of fate, but the feud as extreme and peculiar expression of patriarchal society, which Shakespeare shows to be tragically self-destructive" (84). In *After Juliet*, Sharman MacDonald similarly rejects the idea that fate itself is responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Like Kahn, MacDonald focuses on the influence of the feud as a force that continues to pull the young Capulets and Montagues into early tragic deaths. Sharman MacDonald's play, however, does not draw the sharp distinction between the masculine and violent influence of the parents and the peaceful, feminine forces of youth and love that Kahn implies in her book. The patriarchal aspect of the feud is suggested by Petruchio:

This feud began not in our father's time  
But in our father's father's...  
And yet our young men die  
In the service of this fierce fate. (75)

But the parents of the young Montagues and Capulets are completely absent from the play; the decision to fight or establish peace is entirely in the hands of the children. In the debate that accompanies the decision to support the feud, the language of war is not that of "old men"—war is associated with youth, vigor, and dangerous beauty, and the peaceful Petruchio is taunted for being "old before [his] time" (72-3). The connections between war and the domination of masculine violence are further subverted by MacDonald's decision to portray the female Rosaline as the advocate for war and the

male Petruchio as the more peaceful candidate for the position as head of the family. In *After Juliet*, a child may disobey the order of a parent, a subject may defy the ruling of a king, a woman may refuse to follow a man, and a character may step out of the author's text, but the distinctions between right and wrong, just resistance and violent rebellion, are blurred and broken.

In *Lear's Daughters*, there is no real possibility of rebellion against Lear, either by his family or by his oppressed subjects. Although Lear remains offstage during the play, his controlling presence is deeply felt in different ways by each of his daughters. As the Fool states, the play portrays "three princesses, all grown older, thinking about their father and counting the cost" (227). Both politically and personally, the "costs" of Lear's whims and desires are apparent throughout the play. Goneril reports seeing dungeons in the palace filled with prisoners, and the Fool explains that "Lear's countrymen grow thin, his coffers fat" (229). Lear's wife dies in a miscarriage after Lear's many failed attempts to father a son have weakened and saddened her. When the princesses' Nurse is informed that her services are no longer needed, she wonders bitterly, "how many more? How many more of us will he throw away when we no longer suit?" (231). The Lear in *Lear's Daughters* is not an abused and beloved king with the support of the common people—he is a selfish tyrant unable to manage his kingdom or his family without oppressing them.

Lear is the absent center of the play,<sup>4</sup> the fixed presence around which all of the princesses revolve. As the young girls hear the stories of their births—marvelous tales of great portents and natural disasters told by the Nurse—Lear's presence at Cordelia's birth

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<sup>4</sup> A number of readers of *King Lear* have commented on Cordelia's absence or noted that the Fool takes her place as "the representative of utter truthfulness" while she is gone (see Perret 302, among others). Feinstein and WTG ironically invert the structure of Shakespeare's play by focusing instead by making the Fool a stand-in for Lear and focusing on Lear's absence.

and his conspicuous absence at the births of the two older sisters is emphasized. In their memories of their first attempts to venture down the stairs alone, Lear figures prominently in each of their experiences. Goneril recalls being caught in Lear's throne room, sitting on a throne that is too large for her, proud of her defiance. Regan remembers being a silent observer as a drunken Lear paws at her tired, impassive mother. Only Cordelia's interaction with Lear is direct; she opens the door into a crowded room, where Lear picks her up, spins her in the air, and allows her to twirl on the table in her new satin shift. The memories of the three princesses are fragmented, conflicting, and the only constant is Lear himself. As the sisters grow, all of their actions are built around their relationship with Lear. Cordelia takes her place by Lear's side during her mother's funeral at his command, giving up her Nurse when he demands it, Goneril and Regan are married off to cover Lear's debts, and Regan must induce a miscarriage before her wedding to protect the financial arrangement between Cornwall and Lear. The patriarchal influence of Lear surrounds all of the princesses, even the loving Cordelia, causing them pain and confusion as they grow older and long for some escape. By ending the play just before Shakespeare's *King Lear* begins, Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group allow the tensions over this influence to build like the gathering of a storm, which will reach its breaking point in Shakespeare's play.

Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* follows a similar structure; although it begins after the first act of Shakespeare's play, it tracks the growing tensions in Othello from the women's point of view, then ends just before Desdemona's death. Like *Lear's Daughters*, *Desdemona* keeps the husbands and fathers offstage, but they are present nonetheless, in the restrictive patriarchal society that Desdemona resists

through her use of her own sexuality. By having her heroine use sex to rebel against the limitations placed upon her by the anxieties of patriarchal society, Vogel inverts the causal relationship suggested by much criticism of early modern drama: that patriarchal anxiety is the result of female sexuality. These connections between patriarchal anxiety and female sexuality are well documented in feminist criticism of Shakespeare's plays. In collections such as *Shakespeare and Gender*; *Shakespeare, Feminism, and Gender*; and *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, feminist critics explore difficult questions about female sexuality in the plays, particularly male anxieties over infidelity and containments of women.

Feminist transformations of Shakespeare are similarly preoccupied with the question of the sexual nature and experience of Shakespeare's female characters, but their writers are able to carry their speculation and conclusions further than the critics by changing or revealing intimate aspects of their heroines' stories. In *Desdemona and Gertrude and Claudius*, Paula Vogel and John Updike look at the darker side of male jealousy and female infidelity by re-creating Desdemona as an adulterous wife and recasting the late King Hamlet as a jealous cuckold who intends to humiliate Gertrude or put her to death for her adultery. Authors such as Ann-Marie MacDonald and Paula Vogel can carry the speculations of critics such as Theodora Jankowski (who argues that Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* suggests a sexual relationship between Paulina and Hermione) to a comic extreme by portraying Juliet as infatuated with a female literary critic or Desdemona experimenting playfully with sadomasochistic games under the guidance of Bianca. In *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, Jankowski acknowledges that the relationships she analyzes in Shakespeare cannot be "proved" (that is, verified in



the terms of masculinist criticism) to be the exact equivalent of late twentieth-century lesbian encounters” (xxii). The creative nature of these Shakespearean transformations, however, allows their authors to offer “ocular proof” of anything they choose. Unlike literary criticism of the sexuality of Shakespeare’s heroines, which is limited to hypothetical conjecture based on textual analysis, transformations to Shakespeare’s plays can perform answers as easily as they can perform questions; they can challenge or confirm any critical hypothesis in their own ‘Shakespearean’ text.

While I will examine the critical interpretations of female sexuality in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* in the following chapters, it is *Hamlet* which has inspired the most criticism devoted to female sexuality, especially surrounding the character of Ophelia. In her analysis of female sexuality in *Shakespeare and Gender*, Valerie Traub observes,

Fetishized to the extent that it is utterly divorced from the rest of her being, Ophelia’s chastity embodies, as it were, a masculine fantasy of ‘a female essence’ wonderfully devoid of that which makes women so problematic: change, movement, inconstancy, unpredictability—in short, life.” (125)

Critics such as Ann Thompson, however, question critics who assume that Ophelia is a virgin at the time of her death, a theory embraced by films such as Kenneth Branagh’s 1996 *Hamlet*, which makes the most of Ophelia’s bawdy songs in her scenes of madness. Transformations of *Hamlet* take up these questions and theories, answering and experimenting with these ideas to create new Ophelias who consider sexuality as carefully as their critics. In both of the young adult transformations of *Hamlet*, Ophelia must decide whether she will give in to her desire to have sex with Hamlet or follow the warnings of Polonius and Laertes and avoid Hamlet’s advances. While Fiedler’s Ophelia begins her novel convinced that she will remain a virgin until her marriage, when she

meets secretly with Hamlet “there is a tender invitation in his kisses and I discover that choice is a changeable thing” (50). Although Klein’s Hamlet and Ophelia do marry in secret, they “confirmed [their] vows with the deed of love itself” before their wedding (Klein 102). For both of these Ophelias, their sexual relationship with Hamlet gives a new dimension to the interactions of the two characters that are taken directly from Shakespeare, turning subtext to text.

Margaret Atwood and John Updike also weigh in on Ophelia’s sexuality, although Gertrude is the primary focus of their texts. In response to Hamlet’s comment about the “rank sweat” of Gertrude’s “enseamed bed,” Atwood’s Gertrude retorts:

Everyone sweats at a time like that, as you’d find out very soon if you ever gave it a try. A real girlfriend would do you a heap of good. Not like that pasty-faced what’s-her-name, all trussed up like a prize turkey in those touch-me-not corsets of hers. If you ask me, there’s something off about that girl. Borderline. Any little shock could push her right over the edge.  
(17)

For Atwood’s Gertrude, Hamlet and Ophelia represent the intolerance of youth, the uptight prudishness of those who cannot relax and appreciate the bodily pleasure of food, drink, and sex. Gertrude implies that this repression in Hamlet leads to his suspicious, erratic temperament, and she dryly mocks him when she realizes how badly he has misconstrued the circumstances of his father’s death. Ophelia’s “touch-me-not” attitude towards sex is closely associated with Gertrude’s assessment of her as “borderline.” Like many critics or directors of Hamlet, Atwood’s Gertrude links Ophelia’s sexuality with her madness (or potential madness). If many transformations of female characters are about reclaiming them from criticism and performance interpretations, Atwood takes the opposite approach with her Ophelia. By adhering to the most reductive stereotypes with

the character of Ophelia, Atwood sets up a more marked contrast with her Gertrude.

Similarly, Updike's Gertrude, while pressing Ophelia for information about Hamlet's courtship, wonders to herself:

Had Ophelia already yielded that which could not be bartered back? Had she had the womanly wit to set her lover some trials, enhancing her worth in his eyes? Or in her heated innocence had she given him her body's ultimate pledge? There was something about this fey beauty in her gossamer dress that smelled not quite right, a touch polluted...What had King Hamlet irascibly said? *Her brain holds a crack.* (181, 184)

While Atwood's Gertrude is certain (and slightly contemptuous) of Ophelia's virginity, Updike's Gertrude is haunted by suspicions that Ophelia is no longer a virgin. Just as Atwood's Gertrude follows her comments about Ophelia's repressed sexuality with a judgment of mental instability, Updike's Gertrude considers both Ophelia's virginity and Ophelia's sanity in their brief interview. Although Updike's Gertrude expresses more fondness for Ophelia than does Atwood's Gertrude, there is a similar sense that Gertrude's worldly experience and knowledge of men is a dramatic contrast to the insipid, faltering innocence of Ophelia in both texts.

If Atwood and Updike portray Ophelia as fragile, pale, and untouchable, their interpretations of Gertrude serve as a powerful contrast: passionate, practical, and decisive. Both texts present Gertrude as a warm, charismatic woman who is unfulfilled, both emotionally and sexually, by King Hamlet. In *Gertrude and Claudius*, Updike's Gertrude is unappreciated by King Hamlet, and is won over by Claudius' open adoration for her; their affair is presented almost as a story of star-crossed lovers. For Atwood's Gertrude, her affair with Claudius is a celebration of the joys of the flesh that King Hamlet has rejected, a rebellion against the "prudish" nature that he has passed on to his

son. Neither Gertrude truly connects with her son; they represent a significant departure from the “Holy Mother” described by Lillie Buffum Chase Wyman (qtd in Rozett 71). They are both well-grounded and sensual, with little patience for the affectations and preoccupations of their respective Young Hamlets. These Gertrudes take their sexuality back from the critics who have called Gertrude “rotten through and through” and criticized her “soft, animal nature” (Harry Levin and J. Dover Wilson qtd in *The Woman’s Part* 208). In these texts, the sensuality that is frequently described as a weakness of her character is portrayed as an integral part of her strength, a way that she can escape from the oppressiveness of the patriarchal society in which she lives.

Like Gertrude, Regan has received harsh criticism for her sexuality in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. In *Lear’s Daughters*, Elaine Feinstein and the Women’s Theatre Group take a gentler approach to the sexuality of Regan. The Regan of *Lear’s Daughters* is portrayed from the beginning of the text as the most sensual of the three princesses, drawing her creative inspiration from touch rather than words or color, haunted by the memory of catching her father in an unsettling embrace with her reluctant mother. When Regan does enter into a sexual relationship, she does not do so because of a depraved or corrupt nature, but out of need and neglect:

Regan: I’m not stupid, but I’m not stone, not dead. [Goneril], you’ve always been the first, the cleverest, the best, and Cordelia, she’s the, the pretty, the lovable, Lear’s darling. Then there’s me, in the middle, neither fish nor fowl, do you see? I’ve had nothing that’s, that’s for me, just me. I’ve been number two, between one and three, but nothing. So I’ve taken everything, everything that I can feel or touch or smell or do or be, everything to try and find something, to find me, do you see? (229)

Regan’s affair, like the affairs of the two Gertrudes, comes about because of her need to be appreciated in a court that does not value her, her need to take some satisfaction in a

world that gives her little power. While Feinstein does not present her as truly justified, and her actions result in pain and tragedy rather than true empowerment, the Regan of *Lear's Daughters* is not the despicable creature who emerges in some criticism and performances of *King Lear*. She is a figure to be pitied rather than hated by the audience.

As I will explore in the following chapters, Paula Vogel and Ann-Marie MacDonald both tackle issues related to female sexuality in their transformations, asking and answering the questions of feminist criticism through their own theatrical texts. Like Feinstein, Atwood, and Updike, Paula Vogel explores the connections between female sexuality and the possibility of resistance in an oppressive patriarchy in her play *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*. MacDonald incorporates homosexual and heterosexual desire by both men and women in her appropriations of Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. By bringing the gender-bending romantic entanglements of a Shakespearean comedy into the plots of known Shakespearean tragedies, MacDonald investigates the tensions between sexual desire and textual power, gender and genre.

In their transformations of Shakespeare's tragedies, authors such as Lisa Klein, Lisa Fiedler, Sharman MacDonald, and Ann-Marie MacDonald complicate their treatment of the tragic genre by incorporating one of Shakespeare's most conventional comic devices: female cross-dressing. In *The Woman's Part*, Clara Claiborne Park describes cross-dressing in Shakespearean comedy as "the most useful dramatic device for mediating the initiatives of the female" (108). Park argues that the cross-dressed comedic heroines can take control of the other characters in the play without censure because "the characters, male and female, will accept her behavior because it does not offend their sense of propriety" (108). In the comedies, cross-dressing is a way of giving

a female character, who would otherwise be allowed only limited freedom and little control over herself and others, a way to temporarily assume a position of peaceful power, leading the plots towards their satisfactory conclusions. By bringing female cross-dressing from the light-hearted world of Shakespeare's comedies to the darker plots of his tragedies, these authors experiment with giving tragic female characters more control over their own lives and, occasionally, the lives of others.

Ann-Marie MacDonald, in particular, uses both male and female cross-dressing to explore the conventions of Shakespearean comedy as she deconstructs Shakespearean tragedy. In Act III, a female scholar of Shakespeare's plays enters the world of *Romeo and Juliet*. Having lost her skirt in a sword fight, Constance wears only "her longjohns, boots, and tweed jacket" (A. MacDonald 52). Her bizarre attire mimics the cross-dressing of the Shakespearean heroines, and she is mistaken for a boy, taking the name "Constantine." Juliet's attraction to "Constantine" begins in the same way that her attraction to Romeo does—love at first sight. She declares at her own wedding feast that "the Greek hath taught not just the world to see,/ but also me" (A. MacDonald 64), and pursues Constance for the rest of the play. Constance clearly expects Juliet to follow in the tradition of Olivia in *Twelfth Night* and Phebe in *As You Like It* by abandoning her love for "Constantine" when it is revealed that "for safety did I first secrete my sex.../ My name is Constance. I'm a woman" (76). Juliet, however, delights in the news, declaring her love "unsanctified desire, more tragic far/ Than any star-crossed love 'twixt boy and girl" (77). The idea of a tragic love with a woman appeals to Juliet's longing for "another love for whom to die" (65), and she sees no reason to renounce her love just because she has learned "Constantine's" true gender. Marianne Novy concludes that

MacDonald “thus rejects the ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ of Shakespearean comedy” (Novy 79). MacDonald does reverse the socially acceptable redirection of love in Shakespeare’s cross-dressing comedies. But her use of cross-dressing is also a direct reference to the many sexually charged scenes in Shakespearean comedy that play with the idea of same-sex romance.

Like Viola, who establishes herself in Orsino’s court before she speaks to Olivia, Constance encounters the men of Romeo and Juliet before she meets Juliet herself. After correcting the misunderstanding that would have led to their deaths, she introduces herself as Constantine, “a roving pedant lad to earn my bread/by wit and by this fountain pen, my sword” (A. MacDonald 53). Just as Orsino and Orlando express their gratitude for the services that Cesario and Ganymede provide, Romeo is instantly indebted to “Constantine.” Constance, however, does not fall for Romeo. Instead, Romeo, who has been wed to Juliet for less than a day, is immediately enamored of Constance. His grateful embrace “lingers a little too long” (A. MacDonald 53) and echoes the speech that he made when he first saw Juliet in an aside about Constance. Where Shakespeare’s Romeo says “Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight/For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night” (I.v.50-1) upon seeing Juliet, MacDonald’s Romeo declares “Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, nay!/For I ne’er saw true beauty till this day” (MacDonald 54) when he sees Constance only a short time later. While this is, in part, a comment on the capricious nature of Romeo’s affections, it is also an inversion of the typical relationship between the men and women in Shakespeare’s comedies. Romeo never learns that “Constantine” is truly Constance, and he never sees her dressed as anything but a boy. In Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, Orsino responds to the news that his Cesario is actually a

woman in disguise by saying “give me thy hand/And let me see thee in thy woman’s weeds” (V.i.256-7). In *Goodnight Desdemona*, it is Romeo who makes the transition into “woman’s weeds” (MacDonald 72). When Romeo sees Constance dancing with Juliet at the wedding feast, he declares that “I’ll wear a woman’s gown until I die,/sith it’s a piece of skirt that likes his eye” (MacDonald 66). MacDonald eliminates the crucial moment in which the disguised heroine reveals her true identity to the male character, replacing it with a scene in which the male character disguises himself in an effort to appeal to the boy she is pretending to be. Perhaps in an attempt to one-up the complex gendering of Shakespeare’s Rosalind (a male actor playing a female character playing a male character playing a female character), MacDonald establishes a relationship in which a man dresses as a woman to appeal to a man who is actually a woman dressed as a man.

The female cross-dressing that Sharman MacDonald employs in *After Juliet* is in direct opposition to the cross dressing used in Shakespearean comedies (and Ann-Marie MacDonald’s play). While heroines such as Rosalind dress in masculine clothing in order to disguise themselves as boys, Sharman MacDonald’s heroine Rosaline does not hide her identity while she is in male attire. Like the Roaring Girl of Middleton and Fletcher, Rosaline is adamant in preserving her own identity as a woman even as she dresses as a man:

Petruchio: Your clothes don’t make a man of you.

Rosaline: I wear the clothes to fight more easily.

I have no wish to be a man. (S. MacDonald 67)

Shakespearean heroines such as Portia or Rosalind use any power they have when they are in male attire to achieve peaceful resolution to potential problems; Sharman MacDonald hints at something far more violent with Rosaline’s cross-dressing. When



Rosaline dresses in the clothes of a young man and straps on a sword, it is not an attempt to avert tragedy. While her cross-dressing is an attempt to gain power, Rosaline does not seek the peaceful authority of a comedic heroine. Her actions are a bid for power over the men in her family and an act of war against the Montagues. Sharman MacDonald, like many authors of feminist transformations, gives her heroine more agency to change her lives and the lives of others, but Rosaline chooses to use that agency to become an agent of her own destruction, pulling herself and her family back into tragedy rather than helping them to escape it.

For the Ophelias in the novels of both Klein and Fiedler, dressing in the clothes of a boy is more about freedom and safety than social power. Both characters find their change of attire instantly physically liberating. Klein's Ophelia is delighted by her new clothing, "striding about the cottage marveling at how easily I could move without a petticoat, a kirtle, and a gown clinging to my legs. 'How delightful it is to be a man and free!'" (Klein, 229). Similarly, Fiedler's Ophelia confesses, "In truth, I can recall no other feeling so liberating as this! I may run, jump, kick high as an unbroken stallion! I would ne'er have believed such power could come of wearing breeches! 'Tis yet another injustice against our sex'" (Fiedler, 163). In addition to freedom of physical movement, their boyish appearance allows them more freedom of social movement. Their experiences reflect Clara Claiborne Park's observations on cross-dressing in Shakespearean comedy: "Male garments immensely broaden the sphere in which female energy can manifest itself. Dressed as a man, a nubile woman can go places and do things she couldn't do otherwise" (108). Klein's Ophelia realizes on her journey from Denmark to France that "my plain, mannish appearance also let me pass unnoticed. It gave me the

liberty of looking at everything about me, a freedom not allowed to courtly women” (235). By noting the “injustice” of the physical and social limitations placed on women, both Ophelias show themselves as proto-feminists, aware of their own oppression. While neither Ophelia makes the kind of social power play that Sharman McDonald’s Rosaline does, they both use cross-dressing to free themselves from the restrictions of both patriarchy and tragedy, bringing an aspect of comedy to their stories.

The tragic natures of the Shakespearean source texts and the dissonant comedy of the adaptations intersect to create new interpretations of Shakespeare that blur and blend the two genres. For some of these texts, the appropriation of comedic devices and the re-writing of key female characters lead to the fashioning of a “happy ending:” an aversion or inversion of at least some aspect of Shakespeare’s tragedy. Marianne Novy suggests that, by transforming Shakespeare in this way, these authors are “using fiction as a form of criticism, they let characters escape the plots that doom them to an oppressive marriage or to death” (Novy, 1). In the novels of both Klein and Fiedler, Ophelia makes it through the tragic events of *Hamlet* with her life and sanity intact, due to her own strength, daring, and knowledge. In *After Juliet*, the heroine Rosaline is able to overcome her own tragic tendencies to renounce the feud and use her new position as leader of the Capulet family to establish peace with the Montagues. Constance, the protagonist of *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, takes on the role of the witty fool in addition to that of the cross-dressed heroine, turning *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* into comedies by “saving” Juliet and Desdemona from their tragic deaths. These authors give Shakespeare’s women more power and autonomy than they have in the original plays, allowing them to be agents of their own salvation. Similarly, by stepping beyond the

designated roles of ‘reader’ or ‘spectator,’ these female authors give themselves some power to ‘correct’ the tragic outcomes of Shakespeare’s plots.

Although these ‘happy endings’ alter the texts significantly, the transition from tragedy to comedy is not simple or complete in any of these texts. The darker elements of residual tragedy frequently subvert and undercut the happiness the characters have achieved and the tragic deaths they may have averted. As I will explore in the next chapter, Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* raises important questions about the nature of comedy, tragedy, and authorial agency by rescuing the tragic heroines Desdemona and Juliet from their impending deaths. While Constance is able to divert Shakespeare’s plots successfully, overcoming the tragic natures of the heroines and their innate attractions to death proves more difficult. Similarly, the characters in the texts of Lisa Fiedler, Lisa Klein, and Sharman MacDonald do not escape entirely unscathed from their tragedies. Rather simply ‘correcting’ the painful tragedies of Shakespeare’s plays to create clear-cut comedies, these authors use their alterations to establish and explore the tension between comedy and tragedy, allowing the darkness of Shakespeare’s original plays to color the lightness of the comic elements in their transformations.

The happiest of these new endings occurs in Fiedler’s novel, in which the enterprising Ophelia convinces Laertes to substitute a reversible sleeping potion for the deadly poison that kills Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude in *Hamlet*. As the story comes to a close, all of main characters are revived by the antidote to the potion except for the truly wicked Claudius, who “was given none of the antidote and left to expire” (Fiedler, 190). The only other casualty is Polonius, who is portrayed as a cruel, grasping

politician who is not even Ophelia's real father. But even this ending is tempered by a sense of impending tragedy; on the last page of the novel, Hamlet and Ophelia leave Denmark to visit Verona, where they hope to meet up with Friar Lawrence (who is an old friend of Ophelia's mother) to show him Ophelia's sleeping potion. There is an implication Friar Lawrence will eventually give that same potion to Juliet—the potion that gives her the appearance of death so that she can escape her planned wedding to Paris. The hint that the potion that has saved the royal court of Denmark will soon contribute to the deaths of Romeo and Juliet complicates the joy of the characters and gives the “happy ending” a darker tone. While Fiedler's Ophelia demonstrates an impressive amount of control over the events of *Hamlet*, saving nearly all of the members of the royal court with her knowledge and ingenuity, the novel ends with an ominous reference to a more inevitable tragedy, a story beyond this Ophelia's control.

Klein, while introducing a few comic elements, gives a more somber interpretation of Ophelia's story than Fiedler does. Fiedler's Ophelia is able to completely avert the tragedies that haunt Denmark; Klein's Ophelia only escapes them. Although Klein's Ophelia is able to save herself (and her unborn child), the tragic events of the final act of *Hamlet* play out unaltered in *Ophelia*. Whereas Fiedler keeps the readers in suspense about her Ophelia's ability to avoid death and save the man she loves, Klein uses a framing device to make the outcome of her Ophelia's story clear to the reader from the beginning of the novel. *Ophelia* opens in a convent in France, with Ophelia reading a letter from Horatio recounting the painful events of *Hamlet*'s last act. By beginning her novel with a chapter that clearly takes place after the ending of Shakespeare's play, Klein allows her readers to experience the story of *Hamlet* from

Ophelia's point of view without any misconceptions that other characters can be saved as Ophelia has been. The additional strength of mind and power to change her own position that Klein gives to her Ophelia is juxtaposed with the comparative weaknesses of the other characters, who seem incapable of resisting the allure of revenge and intrigue as they follow their tragic paths to their own deaths. Only Ophelia is given control over her own position in the story, and only Ophelia escapes it.

In Sharman MacDonald's *After Juliet*, the ending is haunting rather than happy, despite the truce that has been established between the two families and the deaths that have been averted. Although Rosaline is able to overcome her own tendency towards tragedy and the play suggests the possibility of eventual marriages between Rosaline and Benvolio and Alice and Petruchio, the play does not end with the potential couples and the hope of a peaceful future. The newly established truce between the two families is broken as the curtain falls, when Mercutio's brother Valentine raises his sword to challenge two sixteen-year-old Capulet boys and the ominous drum replaces the peaceful flute. These rewritings resist tragedy, but they cannot overcome it. Although these authors experiment with the idea of giving characters the power to alter their own tragic course and readers the power to become writers by turning tragedy into comedy, the new agency given to the characters is never quite enough to truly 'save' them all. Despite the many empowering changes these authors make to Shakespeare's plays, the new texts still have a strong undercurrent of tragedy that threatens to pull the characters back down, and it is often futile to resist.

In other transformations, resisting tragedy proves even more futile. *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, which is set during the action of *Othello*, as well as *Gertrude*

*and Claudius*, and *Lear's Daughters*, which are written as prequels set before the action of Shakespeare's plays, all emphasize the inevitability of tragedy. In all of these texts, the action of Shakespeare's plays (and their tragic conclusions) are strongly implied but never directly shown. Paula Vogel's play takes place 'behind the scenes' of Shakespeare's play, but the action ends just before Desdemona retires to her bed on the night of her death. Updike includes lines from Act I of *Hamlet* in the final chapter of his novel, suggesting to the audience that, although the characters believe that the worst is behind them, the real tragedy is just beginning. *Lear's Daughters* ends just before Shakespeare's play begins. Although none of the lines from Shakespeare's play are included to signal the beginning of the end in the closing scene of *Lear's Daughters*, the play leaves little doubt that the tragic events of *King Lear* will follow. *Lear's Daughters* ends with the following tableau:

Fool: An ending. A beginning. (*throws crown into circle, the sisters all reach up and catch it. Freeze.*) Time's up. (232)

While the image of the three sisters reaching for a crown that means very different things to each of them is particular to Feinstein's reinterpretation of *King Lear*, the Fool's lines sum up the quintessential pattern of these tragic prequels to Shakespeare's plays. The endings constructed by the modern authors serve as beginnings to Shakespeare's plays; the action that the audience experiences here is merely a prologue to the destruction that the audience knows is coming, and neither author nor audience has the power to change it—the falling curtain and the final line inevitably signal that “Time's up.”

In his afterward to *Gertrude and Claudius*, John Updike references G. Wilson Knight's description of *Hamlet*: “Claudius seems a capable king, Gertrude a noble queen,

Ophelia a treasure of sweetness, Laertes a generic young man. Hamlet pulls them all into death” (Knight, qtd. in Updike 214). Rather than using *Gertrude and Claudius* as a chance to “save” the title characters from the tragic deaths they experience in *Hamlet*, Updike instead explores the origins of the tragedy. Looking at Gertrude’s lonely childhood, her enforced marriage, her affair with Claudius, and her son’s obsessions, *Gertrude and Claudius* implies the question: where did it start to go wrong? Updike’s prequel does not alter the tragic circumstances of *Hamlet*; it depends on them. As the novel ends, Claudius has assumed the throne, with Gertrude at his side: “He took her yielding hand in his, his hard scepter in the other. He had gotten away with it. All would be well” (211). The dramatic irony of these final lines is apparent to anyone with even a basic knowledge of *Hamlet*. All will not be well in the state of Denmark—it is inevitable that Hamlet will soon “pull them all into death.”

Elaine Feinstein uses dramatic irony in a similar way in *Lear’s Daughters*. The action takes place in a series of disjointed scenes that follow the sisters, their nurse, and the Fool from the childhood of the princesses to the action that takes place immediately before the start of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. As the first of Lear’s daughters to speak to the audience, the young Cordelia announces, “I like words. Words are like stones, heavy and solid and every one different, you can feel their shape and the weight on your tongue. I like their roughness and their smoothness, and when I am silent, I am trying to get them right” (217). At the close of the play, an older Cordelia, who has considered the meanings and failings of language more carefully, repeats her earlier words, adding “I shall be silent now, weighing these words, and when I choose to speak, I will choose the right ones” (232). While “I like words” seems at first somewhat at odds with the disdain that

Shakespeare's Cordelia feels for the "glib and oily art" of rhetoric, the power of these twin speeches relies on the audience's understanding of the silence of Shakespeare's Cordelia. Feinstein highlights young Cordelia's transformation from a child who will say and do anything to please her father to a young woman who must keep silent until she can discover a new voice in which to speak to him. Knowing Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the audience understands that this "silence" that Cordelia adopts in an effort to find the right words will lead to her disinheritance and, eventually, her death.

Just as the authors who incorporate happy endings into the stories often incorporate tragic elements in the texts to counteract the comedy, these authors who emphasize the tragedy of the Shakespearean stories often underscore that tragedy with dark comedy. The comic elements of these texts are even used to emphasize and acknowledge the tragic tendencies of the main characters and the tragic outcomes of the Shakespearean texts. The Fool's narrations and jokes in *Lear's Daughters* provide both comic relief and ironic foreshadowing, emphasizing the darkness of the play while adding a touch of lightness. John Updike also uses dramatic irony to bring humor to his texts, particularly in the irritated and dismissive observations that his Gertrude makes of his Hamlet, which are both amusing in the context of criticism of *Hamlet* and ominous in the context of the coming tragedy. Paula Vogel's *Desdemona* also incorporates a great deal of dark and ironic humor, as I will explore in more detail in a later chapter. Ann-Marie MacDonald also relies on humor, putting forward the idea that Shakespearean tragedy contains the potential for comedy (and *vice versa*). The textual transformations of feminist authors are not about reversing the tragedies of their sources texts entirely or about fully committing to the genre of tragedy. Instead, all of the texts here acknowledge



and explore the tensions between comedy and tragedy, humor and despair, so that the one complements the other, and the result is always a blend of the two genres.

In the following chapters, I focus on two transformations of Shakespeare's *Othello*: Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*. Written towards the end of the twentieth century in Canada and the United States, respectively, these two plays are at opposite ends of the spectrum of feminist revision. While neither play presents a Shakespearean heroine who is able to conclusively escape the bonds of tragedy entirely, MacDonald's play allows both Desdemona and Juliet to break free of their respective texts, miraculously avoiding the deaths planned for them by Shakespeare and the criticism given to them by Shakespearean critics. Vogel's play, by contrast, is a much darker look at the possibility of female rebellion, emphasizing that her Desdemona does not have the option of rebelling productively and effectively. In Marianne Novy's article on revising *Othello*, she mentions that "Vogel's play and MacDonald's stress the difference between their images of women and Shakespeare's, yet both playwrights assume that the play's images of women, and the tradition of criticism surrounding them, are live enough issues to be contested" (73). I believe that Novy's statement is accurate enough, but that the dissonance between *Othello* and the feminist appropriations confirms the significance of the Desdemona figure rather than undermining it. It is because Shakespeare's female characters are "live enough" to "be contested" that authors such as MacDonald and Vogel can use them to address female agency.

Vogel and MacDonald's conflicting approaches to redesigning the character of Desdemona are in keeping with the dual impulses of feminist criticism of Shakespeare—

to call attention to the social and textual restraints on women, and to break free of them. But the feminist authors I examine in this section go beyond just incorporating feminist criticism into their texts. Their texts tackle some of the same critical questions as feminist Shakespeareans: Are Shakespeare's female characters constrained by patriarchy? Can they successfully resist this patriarchy by becoming heroes or villains? Can they escape the confines of their gender by dressing in male attire? How are 'happy' endings themselves a gendered concept, and can the Shakespearean endings be altered? By working these issues out in the creative formats of dramatic literature or prose fiction, these authors provide readings of Shakespeare that break the confines of the original plays themselves, conversing through adaptation by displacing Shakespeare. The act of displacement creates a dissonance with the source text, giving audiences a chance to consider their own gendered assumptions about Shakespeare—and about themselves.

## SECTION II: CHAPTER I

### GENDER AND RESISTANCE IN FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

#### *GOODNIGHT DESDEMONA (GOOD MORNING JULIET)*

BY ANN-MARIE MACDONALD

Feminist critics such as Clara Claiborne Park and Linda Bamber have argued that Shakespeare's tragedies often reinforce patriarchal limitations on women, while some of his comedies offer at least a temporary respite from these limitations.<sup>5</sup> As Angela Pitt explains, "if the dark realm of Shakespeare's tragedies is essentially men's territory, pride of place in the bright panorama of his comedies must surely belong to the women" (74). In *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, playwright Ann-Marie MacDonald transforms Shakespearean tragedy into a comical literary Purgatory in which the characters are able to confront their own flaws and transcend the limitations of gender and genre. MacDonald leads her contemporary protagonist Constance Ledbelly on a journey of self-discovery in which she explores not only her own mind, but those of Desdemona and Juliet. Constance believes that the tragedies of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* might have been comedies, if Shakespeare had not eliminated the character of a wise fool. In a magical (or imaginary) voyage into the texts of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, Constance herself takes on the role of the "Wise Fool" who can "defuse the

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<sup>5</sup> See Claiborne Park's "As We Like It" in *The Woman's Part* and Bamber's *Comic Women, Tragic Men*, among other texts.

tragedies by assuming centre stage as comic hero” (MacDonald 21). Through the character of Constance, who is saved by Desdemona and Juliet even as she saves them, MacDonald carves out a space for positive female agency in Shakespeare’s tragic texts by turning tragedy to comedy.

Ann-Marie MacDonald makes the connections between academic criticism and her own creative criticism apparent when she introduces Constance as an assistant professor of Shakespeare at Queen’s University. Constance has not finished her dissertation, risks “turning into a laughing stock,” and spends most of her free time ghostwriting for Professor Claude Night ” (MacDonald 22). Although she dreams that he will eventually notice her and return her affection, he destroys this illusion in the first scene when he announces his engagement to Ramona, an undergraduate at the university. Constance has also hoped that her work with Night might lead to a lecturing job at Oxford, but Night sets her up with “a lovely post...in Regina” (MacDonald 26) instead. These two blows to her already fragile self-esteem are enough to convince her that her work and her life are meaningless, and that the only way that she will earn her doctorate is “posthumously” (MacDonald 26). At the moment when she feels most hopeless, Constance is transported to Cyprus and Verona where she is able to test the theories of her dissertation on Shakespeare’s characters themselves. Both Constance and MacDonald reconfigure Shakespeare, creating a new text that functions as both a parody and a feminist reading of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

The creative dissonance used by feminist appropriations of Shakespeare assumes (and even requires) audience familiarity with the original text. In the case of *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, MacDonald actually provides the basic background

information necessary for an audience to understand the changes she makes to Shakespeare's plays. The first scene cites Shakespeare's text directly by including excerpts from *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. As Constance contemplates the "tragic turning point" of each play and takes notes for her dissertation, the moments in question are acted out on the stage for the benefit of the audience (16). *Othello* and Iago play out part of Act III, scene iii, in which Iago tells Othello that Cassio is in possession of the handkerchief; Romeo, Tybalt, and Mercutio enact the battle scene that ends in the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio in the first scene of Act III. Constance provides her own commentary on the two scenes as she works, questioning the inevitability of tragedy by speaking out as though she is talking to the characters themselves:

O Othello, O Tragic Man, stop your ears against the false yapping of that cur, Iago. The divine Desdemona, despite her fascination with violence and her love of horror stories, and aside from the fact that she deceived her father to elope with you, is the very embodiment of purity and chastity.  
(MacDonald 16-7)

By bringing these abbreviated scenes into the beginning of the play, MacDonald shows enough of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* that any audience can understand the dissonance created by her parody. But Constance's frequent interjections also point to the limitations of her role as spectator or critic. Her arguments against tragedy are passive—she cannot truly change tragedy to comedy simply by reading the plays.

As a character in a play that transforms Shakespeare, however, Constance is not constrained by the limits of Shakespeare's text. She quickly moves from the passive criticism of analyzing scenes to the more active criticism of altering them. The same "tragic turning point" scenes are revisited as Constance appears within the worlds of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* (16). Both Act II and Act III begin with the actors

presenting the scenes exactly as they were presented in Act I, but Constance, who could only comment on the first scenes from a critical distance, can now interact with the characters. By grabbing Desdemona's handkerchief from Iago and presenting it to Othello, Constance reveals Iago as the villain and saves Desdemona's life. Then, as Tybalt and Mercutio are about to duel to the death, Constance announces Romeo and Juliet's wedding, averting tragedy once again. Due to her instinctive desire to right, and thus re-write, the misunderstandings that resulted in Shakespeare's tragedies, Constance changes one action or line in each scene, and the effects of those moments ripple throughout the play, shifting the focus and turning tragedy into comedy. As Sharon Friedman explains, MacDonald "reveals herself as a spectator/critic in her implicit dialogue with the Bard, as her protagonist explicitly dialogues with his characters through her disruption of scenes and verses" (Friedman 122). But because *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* is an adaptation rather than an academic article, MacDonald and Constance can change the text in addition to giving critical readings—their changes *are* critical readings. By rewriting Shakespeare's text, both MacDonald and Constance establish creative dissonance with *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. While MacDonald figuratively displaces Shakespeare by writing a new play that is in dialogue with his, Constance actually takes Shakespeare's place by learning that she is "the author" of the complicated new story of Shakespeare's tragic heroines (86).

The first target of Constance's (and MacDonald's) revision is Shakespeare's Desdemona, who is often regarded as weak—a "helpless victim" (Claiborne Park). Mark Fortier has described *Othello* as an example of a Shakespearean tragedy that lacks "women of strength and will," and is therefore "the scene of the victimization of weak

and helpless women” (Fortier 47-8). The passivity attributed to the character can be seen in the way that the language of the male characters objectifies her. When Iago first awakens Brabantio to warn him of Desdemona’s marriage, he shouts to “look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!” (I.i.80), counting Desdemona among her father’s inanimate possessions. Throughout the first act, both Iago and Brabantio refer to Othello as a “thief” (I.ii.61) who has “robbed” (I.i.85) Brabantio of his daughter, as though she was simply a belonging passed from one man to another. Othello, when he is angry with her, treats her as a body which can be bought or sold. While MacDonald’s Constance does not adhere to this interpretation of Desdemona, her commentary on the excerpt from *Othello* at the beginning of the play excludes Desdemona, focusing instead on the two men who decide her fate.

But it is Desdemona’s inability to stand up for herself when Othello maligns and abuses her in the second half of the play that gives the most weight to her critical reputation as a passive victim. He strikes her in front of Lodovico and Iago, and in the next scene he insults her by calling her an “impudent strumpet” and “the cunning whore of Venice” (IV.ii.89). Without absolving Othello of his culpability, Kay Stanton also criticizes Desdemona for not being able to offer a defense against Othello’s “verbal rape” (96). Although she protests her innocence, she repeatedly defends him, telling Emilia that “’Tis meet I should be used so, very meet” (IV.ii.107). Her last words are intended to protect Othello from any punishment for her death, and she entreats Emilia to “commend me to my kind lord” (V.ii.28). Judy Ick argues that Desdemona’s actions in the second half of the play mark her as “unrecognizably weak and passive” and maintains that “Desdemona is still perceived ultimately as a victim of patriarchal structures” (44). To

give context to her own reinterpretation of the Desdemona character, MacDonald has Constance mention to Desdemona that “Academe believes that you’re a doomed and helpless victim” (41). The dissonance established by MacDonald’s Desdemona is not just set up in opposition to Shakespeare’s text—MacDonald makes sure that the audience is familiar with the perceived passivity of Shakespeare’s Desdemona, then makes it apparent that her version defies that perception.

The Desdemona of *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* bears little resemblance to the “maiden never bold” (I.iii.95) that Brabantio describes in Shakespeare’s text. Like Shakespeare’s version, MacDonald’s Desdemona marries Othello because she is captivated by his stories of adventure, but this Desdemona is not content to sit at the sidelines. Instead, she is a fearless female warrior who swordfights with Iago and rushes into battle to sever heads. She is capable of all the triumphant achievement that Constance is too terrified to attempt, and, unlike the Desdemona of Shakespeare, she is not limited by her gender. Upon learning of her reputation as a victim, Desdemona exclaims:

Did I not flee my father, here to dwell  
Beneath the sword Hephaestus forged for Mars?...  
Will I not butcher any cow that dares  
Low lies to call me tame, ay that I will!  
So raise I now the battle cry, Bullshit!! (MacDonald 42)

Constance, enthralled by this new Desdemona, confides to Othello “I’ve always thought she had a violent streak, and that she lived vicariously through you, but no one else sees eye to eye with me” (MacDonald 32). Through adaptation, MacDonald gives a literary critic a chance to talk back to Desdemona and Othello directly, explaining and checking her theories about a character. Constance’s empowering reading of Desdemona is enacted



before her and the audience as performative criticism. But MacDonald does not leave the criticism of *Othello* to Constance; her Desdemona steps forward to refute critical interpretations of Shakespeare's Desdemona.

Although MacDonald's Desdemona is established within the text as different from the Desdemona of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Constance still uses this new Desdemona as confirmation of her views of Shakespeare's Desdemona. In *Transforming Shakespeare*, Marianne Novy explains:

Constance's view of Desdemona is actually very close to that of several more sophisticated feminist critics; for example, Mary Beth Rose says, "Openly and proudly acknowledging her love for her husband, Desdemona characterizes herself as a soldier-spouse" and Carol Thomas Neely calls her "strong" and full of energizing power" (68).

The critics identified by Novy draw their more positive readings of Shakespeare's Desdemona from her actions in the first half of *Othello*. Shakespeare's Desdemona makes it perfectly clear to the Duke that she has not been "stol'n" or "corrupted by spells" (I.iii.60-1), and she argues that her marriage to Othello is her own decision. She declares "that I did love the Moor, to live with him, my downright violence and storm of fortunes may trumpet to the world" (I.iii.246). In her description of the courtship and wedding Desdemona uses battle imagery that suggests that she is the conqueror rather than the conquered. This image is consistent with Othello's description of their courtship, in which he does not reveal his love for her until Desdemona gives him a "hint" that "If I had a friend that loved her,/ I should but teach him how to tell my story,/ and that would woo her" (I.iii.164-6). Desdemona's reasons for loving Othello are also a direct contrast to the "maiden...of spirit so still and quiet" (I.iii.95-6) that Brabantio describes. Her interest in Othello began with tales "of the most disastrous chances, of moving accidents

by flood and field.” He wins her love by speaking not her beauty or his devotion, but by telling her of “the cannibals that each other eat” (I.iii.145). When Othello is commanded to Cyprus, Desdemona asks that she be allowed to accompany him. She argues that “If I be left behind,/ a moth of peace, and he go to the war,/ the rites for which I love him are bereft me” (I.iii.254-6). Desdemona defies society when she chooses to disobey her father, marry Othello, and travel with him to war; her actions can be seen as resisting patriarchy rather than conforming to it. By putting Constance in the role of a feminist critic and having her insights “confirmed” in the new Desdemona, MacDonald uses similarity as well as difference to encourage a feminist reading of *Othello*.

Through creating a new Desdemona whose persona is truly that of a “fair warrior,” MacDonald defies interpretations of the character as passive and reinforces feminist interpretations of the character. MacDonald re-imagines Desdemona briefly as a positive role model for Constance, someone who can help her discover her own courage. Sharon Friedman explains that the positive female ‘selves’ in *Goodnight Desdemona* offer women readers a chance to identify with Shakespeare’s female characters as selves rather than others:

MacDonald’s play challenges the institutional power of the theater to reproduce stereotypical roles for women, and the authority of the academy to perpetuate and naturalize these roles with interpretive strategies that preclude personally and politically engaged readings. (Friedman 122)

Friedman’s enthusiasm for “personally and politically engaged readings” is tied to the idea that reinterpreting female characters as positive rather than “stereotypical” allows contemporary women to identify with them (122). An example of a feminist critic looking to Shakespeare’s women as ‘models’ of behavior is Kay Stanton’s conclusion to

her article “‘Made to write ‘whore’ upon?’ Male and Female Use of the Word ‘Whore’ in Shakespeare’s Canon.” Stanton asks her readers to consider how “women should own the term whore,” offering a selection of Shakespearean characters to choose from: “Should we like Desdemona consider the word to be so foreign to our lived experience that we can barely speak it? Should we like Emilia not be intimidated from saying the word?” (99). Stanton goes on to choose the role of Shakespeare’s Bianca, who treats the word “as a stance of male-constructed female representation that travesties the majesty of our sexual power” (100). Both Friedman and Stanton reinforce the idea that Shakespeare’s female characters can serve as inspiration for women four hundred years after they were written.

Constance serves as a dramatic example of a reader who internalizes her interpretations of Shakespeare’s characters. Her feelings for Desdemona verge on hero-worship. She addresses Desdemona for the first time with a hesitant “Hi...Desdemona?...” and the stage directions indicate that she shyly “reaches out to touch the hem of Desdemona’s sleeve” (MacDonald 33). Constance seeks to emulate Desdemona’s fearlessness and strength, to escape the nickname “the Mouse” that plagues her at Queen’s University (35). Although Constance worries that “I can’t even kill a mosquito!” (37), she follows Desdemona’s example and soon finds herself swordfighting with Iago. Her response to the duel takes her by surprise, and Constance declares “I felt a rush of power through my veins./ I tasted iron blood inside my mouth./ I loved it!” (50). By equating Desdemona’s battle stories with her own struggles at Queen’s University, Constance acknowledges that she has spent “ten years an inky slave in paper chains” (40). At Desdemona’s prompting, she admits the hostility that she feels towards Claude

Night for using her work to further his own career. Constance is able to vent her frustration by joining Desdemona in “the battle cry, Bullshit!! Bullshit!!! Bullshit!!!” (42). Through the character of Constance, MacDonald not only challenges “stereotypical” roles for women in the theater, she models the positive effects of “personally and politically engaged readings” (Friedman 122).

Constance’s encounter with MacDonald’s Juliet is similarly cathartic. Like her interpretation of Desdemona, MacDonald’s portrayal of Juliet has its roots in Shakespeare’s text, picking up on the many allusions to death in the lines of Shakespeare’s Juliet. At the end of Act I, just after she meets Romeo, Juliet declares that “if he be married/My grave is like to be my wedding bed” (I.v.132-3). In Act III, when she pleads with her mother to “Delay this marriage but a month, a week;/ Or if you do not, make the bridal bed/ In that dim monument where Tybalt lies” and when she swears that “if all else fail, myself have power to die” (III.v.201-3, 244). In her meeting with Friar Lawrence on the night before she drinks the potion, she again makes connections between love, loyalty, marriage, and death:

Oh, bid me leap, rather than marry Paris,  
From the battlements of any tower,  
Or walk in thievish ways, or bid me lurk  
Where serpents are; chain me with roaring bears,  
Or hide me nightly in a charnel house,  
O’ercovered quite with dead men’s rattling bones,  
With reeky shanks and yellow chopless skulls;  
Or bid me go into a new-made grave  
And hide me with a dead man in his tomb—  
Things that, to hear them told, have made me tremble—  
And I will do it without fear or doubt,  
To live an unstained wife to my sweet love. (IV:i.77-88)

In Romeo's similar scene with Friar Lawrence, he declares that "exile hath more terror in his look,/ Much more than death" (III.iii.13-4), but he never expresses the same grim determination to end his own life that Juliet does. Death and love are companion themes throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, but the imagery linking them is particularly strong in Juliet's lines. In MacDonald's play, Constance gives a critical reading of *Romeo and Juliet* that argues that if the play is "fatalistic at all, any grains of authentic tragedy must be seen to reside in...Juliet" (15). By taking the "fatalistic" tendencies of Shakespeare's Juliet to a comic extreme in her transformed Juliet, Ann-Marie MacDonald gives a similar critical reading of Shakespeare's play.

In *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, the foreshadowing of death that can be found in Juliet's lines is twisted and playfully rewritten. MacDonald's Juliet is obsessed with death. Even Juliet's most casual conversations include implicit (and explicit) references to suicide. She cheerfully mentions death as the inevitable outcome to her quarrels with Romeo, Constance's love for Claude Night, Juliet's love for Constance, and even the question of the whereabouts of her pet turtle, Hector. Bored and depressed by her first night of marriage to Romeo, Juliet responds to a "pretty box," which is brought to her as a wedding gift, by wondering "if it take the measure of my corpse?" and asking her Nurse to "entomb it with the rest" (MacDonald 58). When Constance asks if Juliet is afraid of growing old, Juliet replies that "we change our swaddling clothes for funeral shrouds,/ and in between is one brief shining space,/ where love may strike by chance, but only death is sure" (65). She even comes close to persuading Constance to enter into a double suicide for love by asserting that "the readiness to die doth crown true love,/ and is its richest living ornament" (66). For MacDonald's Juliet, death is not only

the human condition and a reasonable solution to any problem—it is the ultimate expression of love. By creating a Juliet who is not only eager to sacrifice herself for one true love, but several ‘true’ loves, MacDonald calls attention to the tragic tendencies of Shakespeare’s Juliet. The many inventive ways to end her life that Juliet cheerfully describes recalls the excessive list of ways she could harm or debase herself to prove her love to Romeo, listed above. Trying to draw a critical conclusion from Juliet’s preoccupation with death, Constance theorizes that “love is tragic, or it isn’t love,” and she experiments with pursuing the same fatalist love that Juliet advocates (66). Through Constance’s reaction to Desdemona and Juliet, MacDonald returns to the idea that readers look to Shakespeare’s female characters as a reference, a way of reading women and love.

Just as Desdemona awakens Constance’s violent streak, Constance comes to terms with her own self-destructive tendencies and her unrequited love for Claude Night by interacting with Juliet. At Queen’s University, Constance’s initial reaction to hearing about Night’s engagement to Ramona is to declare that she will “call the dean and resign” and, after years of living in isolation and squalor, “drop dead” at the feet of Night and Ramona. In her fantasy, the act of dying will fulfill all of her desires: “I’m awarded my doctorate posthumously. Professor Night dedicates his complete works to me and lays roses on my grave every day. My stone bears a simple epithet: ‘O what a noble mind is here o’erthrown” (26-7). Like Juliet, Constance links love and success with death and escape. When Constance initially refuses to admit “that I felt love for someone who did grind my mind to pulp,” she finally declaims “I loved Claude Night. Love...Amour-at-

first-sight, in plain view, a coup de foudre, la vie en soir, amo amas, amat!!!” (71). When Juliet encourages her to “impale thy cleav’ed heart upon a sword,” Constance responds:

Yes O yes!!! I wish I had the nerve  
To do it right in front of everyone  
While standing in the cafeteria line!  
To play a sawn-song on my arteries,  
Anoint the daily special with my veins! (71)

Constance realizes, however, that “love and death” are not the only things that matter—her true quest is for “self” (71). She recognizes the self-destructive tendencies in Juliet and Desdemona as “tragic tunnel vision,” telling Juliet that “if you really loved me, you wouldn’t want me to die. But you were more in love with death, ‘cause death is easier than love” (85). By teaching Desdemona and Juliet to “live by questions, and not by their solution,” Constance tries to counteract not only their inclinations to tragedy, but her own.

The encounters with Desdemona and Juliet provide an opportunity for Constance to discover the “warrior” (32) and the “lover” (69) aspects of her own personality. By idealizing the characters and their hyperbolic passions, Constance tries on the personas of Desdemona and Juliet, torn between them. At the end of the play, Constance is the center of a struggle between Juliet and Desdemona that is reminiscent of a fight between Romeo and Juliet in the third act. The young lovers, squabbling over a pet turtle, tear him apart as they each try to keep him for themselves. In the final act, Constance takes on the role of the turtle, while Desdemona and Juliet pull at her from both sides, encouraging her to “come and kill” or “stay and die” (84). Constance reacts by rejecting the opposing tragic extremes represented by the two characters, vowing instead to remember that “life is a hell of a lot more complicated than that...a harmony of polar opposites” (85). Although

she tells Desdemona and Juliet “I must have been a monumental fool to think that I could save you from yourselves,” she actually saves both of them by acknowledging her own anger and love, embodying the “harmony of polar opposites” herself. As Constance emerges “from the crucible of experience a stronger, more self-confident woman and scholar,” she adds the two distinct personalities of Desdemona and Juliet into her own personality (Rozett 166).

MacDonald establishes Desdemona and Juliet as aspects of Constance’s own personality even before Juliet appears onstage. During Constance’s adventure in Cyprus, Othello tells her a story about defeating the “beast of Turkish Antioch” (46). The story of the beast serves as a reminder of the “horror stories” (MacDonald 16) that Shakespeare’s Othello uses to woo Desdemona when he tells her “the story of my life from year to year—the battles, sieges, fortunes, that I have passed” (Othello I:iii: 131-3). But Othello’s story carries a particular meaning for Constance and the audience, particularly given that Othello is played by the same actor who plays Claude Night:

Three heads grew from the shoulders of the beast.  
On one the hair was black as ebony,  
The other crown was curl’ed angel fair,  
The third head wore a scarlet cap of wool,  
That ended in a foolish bauble bright. (MacDonald 47)

The three-headed beast represents Constance: a single being who utilizes certain aspects of Desdemona and Juliet within herself. The “scarlet cap of wool” (47) is the “bright red woolen toque with a pom-pom at the end” (14) that Constance wears when she makes her



first entrance, and the other two heads represent the heads of the Shakespearean heroines.<sup>6</sup>

Othello's proud declaration that he "left the thing for dead, as I made haste to find a shallow spot and ford my ox" (47), reminds the audience that Night, after passing Constance's work off as his own, dashes her hopes and leaves for Oxford. Constance's sympathy for the beast and mention of "deja-vu" indicates an understanding of the way that Claude Night has wounded her personally and professionally (47). Constance's feelings for Night figure prominently into the way that Constance comes to terms with her own courage and passion. Admiring Desdemona's fierce defense of her own character, Constance imagines if Night had betrayed Desdemona, "she'd kill him in cold blood and blank verse, then smear the ivied walls in scarlet letters spelling 'thief'" (49). After some prompting from Juliet, Constance acknowledges that "I loved that shit, Claude Night!" (71). Under the tutelage of the two Shakespearean heroines, Constance is able to come to terms with her "loving hate" for Night (*Romeo and Juliet* I:i:170).

Constance's journey is as much about self-discovery as it is about academic research. Her quest begins when she sees a magical inscription on the cover of the manuscript that she is studying, which bids her to:

Open this book if you agree  
To be illusion's refugee,  
And of return no guarantee—  
Unless you find your true identity  
And discover who the Author be. (27-8)

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<sup>6</sup> MacDonald's script of *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* includes alternate versions of this speech to accommodate actresses playing Desdemona and Juliet who do not have hair "black as ebony" or "curl'ed angel fair." By giving each production a chance to customize the text to match the appearance of individual Desdemonas and Juliets, MacDonald makes it abundantly clear to every audience that this speech is about Constance's three-part self.

At Queen's University, Constance has yet to establish a definitive name for herself as a scholar, her students mock her, and the man she loves just uses her to get tenure.

Throughout the play, the other characters are anxious to provide her with their own suggestions for her identity, referring to her as “a learned lady” (33), “the Mouse” (35), “an Amazon” (35), “a crackpot” (41), “a witch” (51), a “fortunate harbinger” (53), a “deviant” (63), and, finally, the “Wise Fool” (86). What she learns moves beyond labels and names, however. Her interactions with Desdemona and Juliet reveal that Constance is stronger than she thought she was—capable of fighting, loving, and seeing past the tragic tendencies that doom both Desdemona and Juliet (85). The Shakespearean texts provide an alternate space<sup>7</sup> in which Constance can work through the issues that are too painful for her to deal with in her everyday life. MacDonald is not the only one to use displacement in *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*—Constance's use of Desdemona and Juliet fits both the literary and psychoanalytic definitions of displacement.

By incorporating commentary on tragedy, comedy, gender, and academia into a new play *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* is a metafictional representation of Shakespeare's Afterlife. At its heart, though, the play is a psychological quest story about identity—a journey into insecurities and personal conflict. The “alchemy” of the play is the way that the “archetypal shadows” of Desdemona and Juliet merge with Constance's journey of self-discovery.<sup>8</sup> Marianne Novy makes the claim that for feminist

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<sup>7</sup> Sharon Friedman refers to Constance's Shakespearean alternate universe as a “green world,” linking it with Shakespearean green world settings (the forest of Arden, etc) and establishing a parallel with the “green ink on foolscap” that Constance uses to write her dissertation (123).

<sup>8</sup> The quotations in this sentence are taken from the poem that ends *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*:

writers and critics, saving Desdemona can be a step towards “saving ourselves” (67). MacDonald models the process of using Shakespeare’s female characters for personal validation and growth through the character of Constance, whose final revelation upon learning that she is the author is:

For those who have the eyes to see:  
Take care—for what you see just might be thee  
Where two plus one adds up to one, not three. (86)

As a feminist literary critic, Constance looks into the texts of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* and sees her own fears and desires. Her interpretations of Desdemona and Juliet are more about herself than about them, and she incorporates what she learns into her own life. MacDonald presents both Desdemona and Juliet as characters whose resonance extends beyond their texts and seeps into the popular imagination, leading them to become sites for both critical discourse and personal identification.

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The alchemy of ancient hieroglyphs  
Has permeated the unconscious mind  
Of Constance L. and manifested form,  
Where there was once subconscious dreamy thought.  
The best of friends and foes exist within,  
Where archetypal shadows come to light  
And doff their monster masks when we say ‘boo.’  
Where mingling and unmingling opposites  
Performs a wondrous feat of alchemy,  
And spins grey matter into precious gold. (87)

## SECTION II: CHAPTER II

### GENDER AND RESISTANCE IN FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

#### *DESDEMONA: A PLAY ABOUT A HANDKERCHIEF* BY PAULA VOGEL

Describing “Women and Authority” in Shakespeare’s plays, Juliet Dusinberre notes that Shakespeare’s plays offer “consistent probing of the reactions of women to isolation in a society which has never allowed them independence from men either physically or spiritually” (92) Paula Vogel’s dark comedy *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* is similarly probing, examining the isolation of women past and present through her reinvention of the characters in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Rather than creating a heroic Desdemona who defies her fate, as MacDonald does, Vogel chooses to depict an environment in which such a character would be impossible. Instead, Vogel creates a silly, spoiled, and promiscuous Desdemona, who attempts subversive resistance instead of progressive achievement. Vogel, like feminist critics such as Kathleen McLuskie, explores the failures and the grim triumphs of Shakespeare’s female characters in their relationships with men and each other. *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* shows subversion instead of triumph and failed resistance instead of progressive achievement. Relying on her audience’s expected familiarity with the plot and characters of *Othello*, Vogel alters key aspects of the text to call attention to the limitations and pressures that

define the lives of women, not only in early modern literature and culture, but also in her own time.

After examining historical and textual female agency in response to slander in “Why Should He Call Her Whore? Defamation and Desdemona’s Case,” Lisa Jardine concludes:

‘In history, agency is a dynamic, in relation to women and to men (both men and women have acted, have been acted upon). It is this historical agency which I have been concerned to retrieve, in theory as well as in practice.’ In my exploration of *Othello*, I have not been able to give back to Desdemona power to accompany her activity. (34)

Like Jardine, Vogel uses the character of Desdemona to explore the possibility of female agency (both on the stage and off). As a playwright who adapts Shakespeare’s plays, however, Vogel has a power that Jardine does not. As a critic, Jardine is limited to the text of *Othello*; she can only analyze Desdemona’s actions (or lack thereof) and compare them with the actions of carefully selected historical figures. While Jardine is able to make a strong case for the historical agency of women in early modern England, the textual agency of Desdemona’s character remains problematic. In her examination of Desdemona’s agency, she cannot re-write the actions of a literary character, and she must acknowledge that “in spite of her private protestations of innocence, Desdemona does nothing formally to restore her now ‘actually’ impugned reputation” (31). By appropriating Desdemona from Shakespeare’s text, Vogel can “give back to Desdemona power to accompany her activity” (34) if she so chooses. But instead of rewriting the plot of *Othello* to give Desdemona additional agency (or even a stronger voice), Vogel chooses to emphasize the social limitations that keep Desdemona from exercising her agency.

In an interview with Arthur Holmberg about her 1998 play *How I Learned to Drive*, Vogel explains that “for me, being a feminist does not mean showing a positive image of women” (qtd. in Holmberg 1). Where Ann-Marie MacDonald takes a prescriptive approach to altering Shakespeare by slowly building positive role models out of Shakespeare’s heroines, Vogel’s approach is more descriptive. Although Vogel’s Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca resist the cruel behavior of Othello, Iago, and Cassio, they are not painted as paragons of virtue. Instead of demonstrating heroic behavior that defies their circumstances, they fall into destructive behavior that serves as a reflection of their environment; it is impossible for them to act otherwise. Her characters are selfish, violent, lustful, and insecure.

Vogel’s pessimism undercuts not only the heroic reinterpretations characterized by texts such as MacDonald’s *Goodnight Desdemona*, but also the optimism that characterizes studies of *Othello*’s female characters by authors such as Carol Thomas Neely and Kay Stanton. While Neely and Stanton offer Emilia and Bianca as strong women that take steps to overcome the misogyny generated by characters such as Iago, Vogel’s text argues that they are just as ineffectual as Desdemona because they too are trapped in a society dominated by male power. The pessimism of Vogel’s play does not make it anti-feminist. Like many feminist critics, she turns a critical eye on subjects such as female agency and autonomy, male and female sexual objectification, and patriarchal oppression. The darker spin that she gives these issues in her play is more of a comment on women’s position in society than it is a comment on women’s characters. Vogel explains that, for her “being a feminist means looking at things that disturb me, looking at things that hurt me as a woman. We live in a misogynist world, and I want to see why”

(qtd. in Holmberg 1). By transforming the female characters of *Othello*, Vogel draws attention to the darkest impulses of men and women, real and fictional, past and present.

As Vogel's play moves towards the inevitable conclusion of Shakespeare's tragedy (the death of Desdemona), it invites the audience to explore its own complicity in Desdemona's death. In each production of *Othello*, the audience is asked to sympathize with a character who murders his own innocent wife, to find him a tragic hero rather than a villain. At the heart of this is what Marvin Rosenberg calls "the problem of *Othello*." Rosenberg asks, "How can he be both noble and a murderer? What kind of sympathy, what empathy, can he evoke?" (5). In an interview with Simi Horowitz, Vogel acknowledges her own willingness to overlook *Othello*'s actions: "I empathize with *Othello* more than Desdemona. I am crying for a man who killed his wife because he believes he was cuckolded. How can I, as a woman, possibly understand that? But I do" (qtd in Horowitz, 3). Vogel's plays challenge preconceptions of audience empathy, asking audiences to see characters such as *Lolita* or Desdemona as subjects. Vogel describes being drawn to *Othello* and *Lolita* "as a young feminist, an ardent feminist, so drawn in and wrapped up in empathy for *Othello* and Humbert Humbert" and wondering "How would a woman writer do this? Could a woman writer write something where our empathy would be evenly located?" (qtd in Clay 1). In *How I Learned to Drive*, Vogel gives a retelling of a *Lolita*-esque story that encourages the audience to empathize with both the *Lolita* figure (Li'l Bit) and the Humbert figure (Uncle Peck). Vogel struggles similarly with the issue of equal empathy in *Desdemona*, asking her audience to respond to both the Desdemona character and the absent *Othello* by acknowledging the different degrees of fault and victimization in *Othello*.

Vogel's text demands that audience reconsider their own preconceptions about the culpability or innocence of Shakespeare's characters. Desdemona's guiltless chastity is crucial to the plot of Shakespeare's *Othello*. The determination with which Othello investigates Iago's claims, demanding "ocular proof," gives credibility to the idea that Othello is justified in ending Desdemona's life if she is proved guilty (III:iii:376). As he watches Desdemona sleep, just before he ends her life, he rationalizes that "she must die, else she'll betray more men" (V.ii.6). Othello justifies his actions by arguing that he is preventing future crimes, not avenging past wrongs. He only expresses remorse for his actions when he realizes that Desdemona is guiltless. Vogel's *Desdemona* dramatically alters this crucial element by presenting a heroine who is anything but chaste. In Shakespeare's play, Othello declares "I had been happy if the general camp...had tasted her sweet body, so had I nothing known" (III.iii.344). In Vogel's adaptation, Othello gets his wish.

Vogel's Desdemona spends Tuesday nights in Bianca's brothel, where she has slept with most of the garrison (everyone but Cassio, the one man Othello suspects). While Vogel's Othello is actually the "cuckhold" (IV.i.191) that Shakespeare's Othello believes himself to be, the play clearly states that Cassio is "the only one" (Vogel 14) that Desdemona has not betrayed her husband with. Although Vogel's Desdemona might be guilty of countless charges of adultery, Othello still kills her for the one act she has not committed. By not giving Othello the justification of discovering his wife's activities, Vogel emphasizes that innocence and chastity are not necessarily the same thing—while Desdemona has violated her marriage vows, she is still innocent of the charges that Othello and Iago bring against her. Desdemona's unique combination of guilt and



innocence forces the audience to confront their own biases. As Marianne Novy points out, “the play asks, among other things: ‘Do we feel different about a husband killing a wife who is really unfaithful? Should we? In what ways should we feel the same?’” (73). By giving the audience “ocular proof” of Desdemona’s infidelity, Vogel puts the audience in Othello’s position, challenging them to consider their own complicity in Desdemona’s death.

Vogel presents Desdemona’s aggressive sexuality as an act of resistance, albeit unsuccessful. Feeling frustrated by her life, her marriage, and her position in society, she rebels in the only way that she can—through her body. Desdemona feels liberated by her sexual adventures, as though she can achieve her dreams of travel and adventure through sex with men who have traveled and fought. In an attempt to explain this feeling to Emilia, Desdemona describes it as a way to satisfy her “desire to know the world” (Vogel 20). She achieves this vicarious travel as:

They spill their seed into me, Emilia—seed from a thousand lands, passed down through generations of ancestors, with genealogies that cover the surface of the globe. And I simply lie still there in the darkness, taking them all into me; I close my eyes and in the dark of my mind—oh, how I travel! (Vogel 20)

Because sex is the only power that Desdemona holds, she has no qualms about using it as a means of escape from her physical and mental environment. In both her visits to the brothel and her marriage to Othello, Desdemona tries to use her body to break free of the limitations that Venetian society has imposed on her. She describes her reaction to Othello’s skin as hopeful that “If I marry this strange dark man, I can leave this narrow little Venice with its whispering piazzas behind—I can escape and see other worlds” (20). She is disappointed, however, to learn that “under that exotic façade was a porcelain-

white Venetian” (20). Sexual desire, for Vogel’s Desdemona, is tied with the idea of escape. She uses men to escape Venice, both literally and figuratively. But her attempts are always unsuccessful. Othello’s exoticism is only skin-deep, and the men she sleeps with in Bianca’s brothel don’t come from “a thousand lands”—they are Venetian soldiers, including Iago.

Marianne Novy argues that “the relationships that [*Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*] scrutinizes are those between women” (Novy 70). But to disregard the influence that the male characters have on the women of the play is to leave many of their most fundamental motivations unexplored. While it is true that the male characters never actually appear on stage, their influence resonates in every aspect of the women’s behavior. The majority of the play’s action is driven by the male characters, from the opening scene (in which Emilia steals the handkerchief for Iago) to the closing scene (in which Desdemona prepares for bed on the night of her death). Vogel’s women define themselves through their relationships to the men in their lives. Desdemona is a “daughter of a senator” (17), a wife, and a victim, but she never establishes an identity of her own. Emilia is a servant and wife who longs for the day that Iago makes her “a lieutenant’s widow” (14). Bianca, the only female character to survive Shakespeare’s play, wants to trade her identity of ‘whore’ for that of ‘wife’ and live with Cassio in a “cottage by th’ sea, wif winder-boxes an’ all them kinds of fings” (38). Shifting the focus to Shakespeare’s female characters only serves to emphasize the restrictions on female agency in *Othello*.

In *The Woman’s Part*, Carole McKewin explains that “with no family or friends, Desdemona and Emilia are alone in a military camp, where masculine conceptions of

honor define what a woman is” (128). Vogel’s play echoes the idea of female isolation in an environment that is controlled by men. When Vogel’s Emilia tries to convince Desdemona that men use women like they might use inanimate objects, she is reflecting the Shakespearean Emilia’s statement that men “are all but stomachs, and we are all but food;/ They eat us hungrily, and when they are full,/ They belch us” (III.iv.98-100). Throughout Shakespeare’s play, the men are constantly trying to use the women for their own benefit. Iago uses Desdemona’s life as a tool in his own complex game of vengeance and manipulation, which is only possible because he uses his wife to steal Desdemona’s handkerchief. Cassio uses Desdemona as a means of recovering his position. Othello uses Emilia to find out information about Desdemona, and when she does not respond as he expects her to, he refers to her as a “bawd” (IV.ii.20). Immediately following this scene, Emilia attempts to make sense of the confusion of jealousy and adultery by asserting:

Let husbands know their wives have sense like them...  
And have not we affections  
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?  
Then let them use us well: else let them know,  
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.  
(IV.iii.91-101)

This ties together the theme of use and abuse that runs throughout the play, and the eye-for-an-eye pragmatism that characterizes Emilia’s speech is in keeping with the practicality that Emilia expresses when she states that she would “make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch” (IV.iii.70). *Othello* presents men as subjects who evaluate the current situations and react to them, while women are often viewed as prizes, temptations, pawns, and other objects.

Vogel's play ironically inverts the typical representation of a female sexual object that is admired and desired by the men; instead, women are the admirers or critics who view men as objects. Where Desdemona herself is compared to inanimate treasures such as "monumental alabaster" (5.2.5) in Shakespeare's play, Vogel presents a playfully bawdy Desdemona who fondles a hoof-pick and quips that a man of that size "could pluck out my stone" (9). She teasingly asks Emilia if her "husband Iago [has] a hoof-pick to match?" and laughs when Emilia replies that "the wee-est pup of th' litter comes a'bornin' in the world with as much" (Vogel 9-10). Similarly, Desdemona delights in "demurely" mentioning to Bianca that "Emilia must constantly mend" Othello's undergarments because "he's constantly tearing his crotch-hole somehow" (Vogel 29). In Vogel's *Cyprus*, the men are as objectified as the women are, and Desdemona delights in her sexuality, believing that she is using the men more than they are using her.

On the surface, the sexual gaze that Desdemona directs at Othello seems to represent the shift in female desire that critics such as Hélène Cixous call for—a "multileveled libidinal energy shaped by female bodily drives that find their way into the style of feminist writings" (Freedman, 115). Vogel's Desdemona demonstrates a desire for sex and a visual appreciation of the male form, her behavior attempts to reverse the objectification that Shakespeare's Desdemona is subject to. But her gaze, which she uses to turn men into objects of lust or mockery, lacks the "potency...the omnipotence of gazing, knowing" that characterizes the male gaze as described by Luce Irigaray (Herndl and Warhol, 430). Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca can observe men, discuss them, even desire them, but they do not have the social power to control them. While Ann-Marie MacDonald gives Desdemona both the envy/desire of Othello's gaze *and* Othello's

power to act on it, Vogel's Desdemona expresses desires, but she lacks the power to effect real change. She tries—by marrying Othello to escape Venice, cuckolding him to escape the confines of her marriage, then planning to leave with Ludovico to escape Othello's jealousy. Unlike MacDonald's Desdemona, Vogel's Desdemona cannot escape the plot of Shakespeare's *Othello*, however much she wants to.

Just as Othello, Cassio, and Iago control the action of Vogel's play without appearing onstage, Desdemona's impending death is crucial to Vogel's dramatic structure, although the audience never sees her murder. Vogel relies on the audience's knowledge of Othello to establish a strong sense of dramatic irony in many of her characters' lines. When Emilia refers to Othello's questions about the handkerchief as "just a passing whim" (Vogel 7), the audience understands that Othello's jealousy is strong enough to drive him to murder. As Desdemona giggles about the barbarity of displaying bloodied bridal sheets for "half the garrison" (Vogel 8), it is hard to avoid thinking of the "tragic loading of this bed" from Shakespeare's *Othello* (V.ii.363). Emilia warns Desdemona that Othello will kill her if he finds out about the time that she has spent in Bianca's brothel, but Desdemona pays little attention to the prediction. Her flippant protest that "nothing will happen to me. I'm the sort that will die in bed" is meant to assuage Emilia's fears (Vogel 12). Instead, it serves as a reminder to the audience that Othello will murder Desdemona "in bed" (Vogel 12) that very evening. Like John Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius* and Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*, Vogel's *Desdemona* hinges on the audience's knowledge of *Othello* to emphasize the tragedy to come.

When Emilia pleads "M'lady, don't go to your husband's bed tonight. Lie apart—stay in my chamber" (Vogel 44), the danger resonates with Desdemona as well as the

audience. Her naïve plan is to feign sleep when her husband comes to her room that night, and then leave the next morning for Venice. Her hope that “surely he’ll not harm a sleeping woman” (Vogel 45) serves as a reminder that Othello wakes Desdemona with a kiss and asks her “Have you prayed tonight, Desdemon?” (V.ii.26) before he kills her. As Desdemona prepares for bed, the audience cannot help but realize how close she is to her own death. As the curtain falls, Emilia asks if Desdemona would like her to “brush your hair tonight? A hundred strokes?” (Vogel 46). This ritual of brushing Desdemona’s hair serves as a countdown until the moment when Desdemona must exit to her chamber. As Emilia reaches the ninety-ninth stroke, the play ends in an abrupt blackout, which implies that, as the theater puts out the lights, Othello will “put out the light” (V.ii.8). The inevitability of tragedy is clear, despite the many changes that Vogel makes to the character of Desdemona. Vogel’s Desdemona is acutely aware of the danger she is in, and she has a plan to escape Cyprus—yet she still suffers the same fate as Shakespeare’s Desdemona.

The failure of Vogel’s Desdemona to break free of the tragic pull of the plot of *Othello* can be attributed as much to the women in the play as the men. Vogel’s Emilia states that “women don’t figure into [men’s] heads...that’s the hard truth. Men only see each other in their eyes” (Vogel 43). But the female characters in Desdemona are similarly guilty of overlooking the feminine sphere in favor of the masculine. Vogel’s Desdemona might have been saved if she had embraced a true friendship with Emilia or Bianca. As Marianne Novy argues:

Hiding out in Bianca’s brothel until she can leave Cyprus would actually provide the best opportunity for Desdemona to survive, but she doesn’t understand the need for this until too late, since Emilia doesn’t give her

enough information until after Bianca has left in a rage over Desdemona's supposed affair with Cassio. (75)

Even if Desdemona could be saved by information from Emilia, as Novy argues, Desdemona's behavior has already alienated her before the play's opening scene. Unlike Shakespeare's Desdemona, who does nothing to deserve the theft of her handkerchief, Vogel's Desdemona delights in mocking and annoying Emilia. She strings her along with false promises of promotions and occasional gifts of discarded clothing, and she demands Emilia's "confidence" (14) in return. Desdemona's brief acknowledgement of Emilia's honesty and value when she gives Emilia an expensive ring comes across as too little, too late. By the time the two women form a true bond, the chain of events leading to their deaths has already been set in motion.

Vogel's play does not make the argument that Desdemona is the only female character incapable of developing successful friendships with other women. The antipathy between Bianca and Emilia that is briefly explored by Shakespeare is revisited and expanded in Vogel's drama. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, the only encounter between Emilia and Bianca occurs just after Cassio's death, when Emilia cries out "O fie upon thee strumpet," and Bianca replies that she is "no strumpet, but of life as honest/As you that thus abuse me" (V.i.121-3). In Vogel's play, Emilia dismisses Bianca as "a small town floozy with small town slang" (Vogel 25). Vogel's Bianca echoes Shakespeare's by initially defending herself to Emilia by claiming "Aw'm as 'onest a woman as yerself!" (26). The antipathy between the two characters continues throughout the play, with each woman claiming to know more about Desdemona, Cyprus, even religion. Similarly,

Bianca begins the play with a genuine affection and respect for Desdemona. When Emilia attempts to shame Bianca into leaving the palace, Bianca responds:

Aw likes yer lady, whefer you think so or not. She can see me as Aw am, and not ask for bowin' or scrapin'—and she don't have to be nobby, 'cause she's got breedin', and she don't mind liking me for me own self—wifout the nobby airs of yer Venetian washerwomen! (Vogel 26)

But Bianca's initial friendship with Desdemona is not strong enough for Bianca to trust her when Bianca (like Othello) begins to suspect that Desdemona is sleeping with Cassio. Rather than serving as an example of a friendship that transcends class barriers, Desdemona and Bianca's relationship devolves into a brawl in which they attack each other with a hoof-pick and a broken wine bottle. All of the women in *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* are just as doomed by their failure to form honest and loving relationships with each other as they are by their relationships with men. The differences between Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca are such that Desdemona is unable to truly connect with either of the women, and the others feel nothing but resentment towards each other. Paula Vogel explains that “*Desdemona* shows how women participate in a social system that does not allow them to bond. We bond with our husbands and our class structure rather than with each other” (qtd in Holmberg 1). There is no indication that these women could ever form a supportive female community, and their interaction provides no defense against tragedy.

While Shakespeare's Desdemona and Emilia have a closer relationship than Vogel's, giving *Othello* at least one genuine female friendship, they are unable to use that friendship to avert Shakespeare's tragic ending. Carole McKewin argues that the conversation between Desdemona and Emilia in Act IV, scene iii “reflects the texture



of...oppression. Their language is imbued with frustration and evasion” (128). This conversation is the one scene in Shakespeare’s text that Vogel adapts directly, and the scene in *Desdemona* that most directly contradicts the characterizations of *Othello*. At this point in the text, Desdemona, who has been pondering the adultery that her husband has accused her of, asks Emilia if she would “do such a deed for all the world” (IV.iii.66). Emilia, ever pragmatic, answers that “the world’s a huge thing: it is a great price for a small vice” (IV.iii.67). Instead of portraying the contrast between the innocent and devoted Desdemona and the practical Emilia, as Shakespeare does, Vogel reverses their opinions on the issue of adultery and explores the implications that these changes have for each of the characters. In Vogel’s version, Emilia is the one who argues that she would not commit adultery “for all the world,” and it is Desdemona who states that “the world’s a huge thing for so small a vice” (Vogel 19). Shakespeare’s Emilia justifies her answer by describing the benefits that her husband could receive in return for her unfaithfulness. Vogel’s Desdemona, however, does not speak of gaining “the world” for her cuckolded husband—she wants it for herself. Vogel’s Desdemona longs to travel to “other worlds—worlds that we married women never get to see” (19) and break free of the limitations that society has imposed upon her.

Vogel’s Emilia, by contrast, has little use for travel, sex, or even her husband. Her marital fidelity comes not out of love or loyalty to Iago, but out of concern for the rules laid out by the “Holy Fathers and the Sacraments of the Church” (18). As the play progresses, however, these rules become increasingly blurred in Emilia’s mind. After learning that Iago has been visiting Bianca’s brothel, Emilia gives up any pretense that she might have had about the sanctity of the bond between Iago and herself and fully

commits to her decision to leave him. Desdemona explains Emilia's unhappiness by blaming her relationship with Iago, stating that "he's been spilling his vinegar into her for fourteen years of marriage, until he's corroded her womb from the inside out" (28). There is an element of truth to these charges, for Emilia describes her sexual experiences with Iago as cold and lonely, a battle of wills in which she vows "not to be there for him" (43). The play makes it clear that, although Emilia hates her husband, she devotes most of her time to begging for Desdemona to secure small promotions for him from Othello, and Desdemona sometimes consents. These requests, however, do not serve as an example of the love and loyalty that Emilia feels for her husband. They are the result of Emilia's cold determination to become "a lieutenant's widow" and help herself to "what's left, saved and earned, under the mattress" (14) instead of leaving it for Iago to keep after her death. Emilia's resistance is less obvious than Desdemona's blatant infidelity, but it is present in the character's fervent desire to outlive or escape her husband. The futility of Emilia's dream is made apparent by Vogel's use of dramatic irony—the audience understands that Emilia will escape Iago only through her death later that evening, when he kills her for defending Desdemona against his charges. While resistance is possible in Vogel's depiction of Cyprus, success and triumph are not.

Vogel uses displacement to demonstrate the painful limitations of female agency, inviting audiences to see female resistance and oppression through Shakespeare's women. Her revised *Othello* does not 'correct' the darker plots of Shakespeare's play by 'saving' Desdemona and glorifying the female characters. Desdemona cannot triumph in Vogel's play, and the hope that the three female characters might rewrite the story in a positive way is futile. Although the women of Vogel's *Desdemona* are each doomed to

fail at their respective attempts to escape the situations that control them, the text still maintains a feminist perspective. The feminism of *Desdemona* does not demonstrate empowerment, enlightenment, or equality—these positive elements are replaced with a kind of negative empathy. Referring to her play *How I Learned to Drive*, Vogel argues that a play is not have to make audiences “feel good” to take a feminist stance—“It can be a view of the world that is so upsetting that when I leave the theatre, I want to say no to that play, I will not allow that to happen in my life” (qtd in Holmberg). Vogel’s *Desdemona* is not prescriptive, not a utopian image of what the world should be like for women. Likewise, the women themselves are not positive, successful heroes. Vogel asks her audiences to say ‘no’ to constraints on female agency and ‘no’ to female complicity and isolation. By not saving Desdemona, Vogel invites her audiences to save themselves.

### SECTION III

## RACE AND REBELLION IN POSTCOLONIAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

### INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's plays are filled with pairings of perceived 'selves' and 'others:' English/French, Roman/Egyptian, European/African, Christian/Jew, Man/Monster. From Othello to Shylock to Caliban, Shakespeare's characters have come to serve as complex symbols for society's cultural 'others.' The afterlives of these characters in criticism, performance, and adaptation reveal as much about Shakespeare's readers than they do about Shakespeare's plays. An analysis of Othello's position in Venice is informed by the history of racial difference, just as directors of *The Merchant of Venice* must consider how to represent Jewishness in the character of Shylock. With the rise of postcolonial theory in the middle of the twentieth century, critical interpretation of Shakespeare's othered characters underwent a shift. Caliban, Othello, and Shylock began to be seen as oppressed and marginalized figures through which debates about ethnicity and colonialism could be addressed. In this section, I will examine the ways that Shakespeare's characters have been appropriated by playwrights and used in response texts to stage dramas of race and rebellion.

The resonance that Shakespeare's characters have as postcolonial symbols stems in part from the role of Shakespeare in asserting and maintaining colonial authority. For

example, Shakespeare's Prospero and Caliban were used in the 1950s by Octave Mannoni to justify his interpretation of the superiority of the colonizer in *The Psychology of Colonization*. In his analysis of the way that *The Tempest* was used in colonial Africa, Thomas Cartelli explains:

Shakespeare functions in such political transactions as an unassailable source of moral wisdom and common sense, as a touchstone not only of what is right and just, but also of what is necessary and practical. His name lends both respectability and moral probity to the positions his appropriators wish to advance (Howard and O'Connor 99).

Shakespeare was referenced as the quintessential British genius, whose words could validate the colonial worldview. David Johnson explains that the educational policy leaders in colonial South Africa "placed great value on Shakespeare" as a means of civilizing the native population (230). Johnson cites a "colonial educationalist" by the name of A. Victor Murray, who felt that "Africans are centuries behind European peoples in literary expression" and maintained that "it seems unreasonable to introduce rotation of crops and to withhold Shakespeare" (222). As cultural masterpieces that could be taught and authoritative source texts that could be cited, Shakespeare's plays functioned as proof of the superiority of the colonizers over the colonized.

If "Shakespeare as a cultural force" played a key role in the "creation" and "maintenance" of colonial authority, his plays and characters have also been a part of the "undoing of empire" (McDonald 778). Shakespeare's plays have been consistently employed by oppressive societies, but they have been equally powerful in the hands of the oppressed. In a newspaper article describing the impact of Shakespeare on the liberation movement in South Africa, Anthony Sampson explains that revolutionaries

used Shakespeare's words as inspiration in their struggle for independence, even while imprisoned:

Opposition leaders found most solace from Shakespeare when they were imprisoned on Robben Island. The prisoners included Africans, Indians and Coloureds, Muslims, Christians and atheists; but they found a common supporter and teacher in Shakespeare, whose understanding of human courage and sacrifice could reassure them that they were part of a much larger world (Sampson, 2001).

By introducing Shakespeare's texts as a 'civilizing' influence, colonizers established Shakespeare as a means of discourse that postcolonial readers and writers used in turn to question the authority of colonial 'civilization.' As Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin explain, "colonial masters imposed their value system through Shakespeare, and in response colonized people often answered back in Shakespearean accents" (Loomba and Orkin 7). While the "Shakespearean accents" described by Loomba and Orkin refer primarily to critical interpretations or political movements, I argue that postcolonial adaptations of Shakespeare's texts function as direct ways to "answer back" to colonial oppression.

Postcolonial adaptation of Shakespeare has focused primarily on three texts and characters: Othello from *Othello*, Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice*, and Caliban from *The Tempest*.<sup>9</sup> These three characters have become well known as symbols of otherness, developing a complex afterlife that goes beyond the original plot or context of each play. Caliban, through his power-struggle with Prospero, has become "an analogue

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<sup>9</sup> There are of course many exceptions to this generalization. Sulayman Al-Bassam's revisions of *Hamlet* and *Richard III* could be considered postcolonial. Roy Williams' *Days of Significance*, an adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* touches on issues of postcolonialism. Even Raquel Carrio's postcolonial *Otra Tempestad*, which I cover in another chapter, adapts *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in addition to *Othello*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *The Tempest*. But in my experience *Othello*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *The Tempest* are the most popular source texts for a postcolonial transformation. That these are also the primary characters examined in postcolonial criticism (see Loomba and Orkin 9) is indicative of how much these adaptations serve as parallel forms of criticism, approaching the same issues through a creative format.

not only of slavery, but also of the domination of indigenous peoples by European intruders” (McDonald 779). Although the historical oppression of people of African descent or people of the Jewish faith is not “colonialism” per se, critics such as Ania Loomba have used postcolonial theory to address issues of race and questions of identity even where definitions of colonialism do not strictly apply. In *The Psychology of Colonization*, Octave Mannoni describes the “Prospero complex” as an image of “the paternalist colonial, with his pride, his neurotic impatience, and his desire to dominate” (110). Mannoni includes “the Negroes, even the Jews” among the Caliban-esque “others” that these European Prospero-esque “selves” fear and want to control (111). As fictional representatives of ‘othered’ categories, Othello, Shylock, and Caliban are often “replaced” or “displaced” by authors in an effort to define or defy those categories. In an article on *Othello* in performance, Sujata Iyengar asserts that “since identities or characters are not fixed or eternal, we should think of them not as states of being, but as processes of negotiation, responsiveness, and change” (103). The very flexibilities and ambiguities of these characters in Shakespeare’s texts have made them perfect targets for ‘re-negotiation’ by authors and critics. Othello, Shylock, and Caliban therefore function as postcolonial ‘barometers’ (or “divining rods,” to use Iser’s term), with each change in adaptation giving insight into the ways that different types of others are perceived.

Just as *The Tempest* serves as a master narrative of colonialism,<sup>10</sup> *Othello* fills a similar role in examinations of race and ethnicity. Due to the “energies and passion of the postcolonial critics,” Russ McDonald argues that “*Othello* bids fair to become to the

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<sup>10</sup> Chantal Zabus cites four “interpolative dream texts” of the colonial imagination: “*The Tempest* for the seventeenth century; *Robinson Crusoe* for the eighteenth century, *Jane Eyre* for the nineteenth century; *Heart of Darkness* for the turn of the twentieth century” (1).

twenty-first [century] what *Hamlet* was to the nineteenth century and *King Lear* was to the twentieth” (779). Othello (both the character and the play that bears his name) is a problematic subject for contemporary scholars of race and literature. Michael Neill offers the following words of caution:

Because Othello is a tragedy about “race” written before the terminology of “race” was even invented, we cannot (as some recent critics have attempted to do) read it as either “racist” or “anti-racist;” instead, it is an essential document of the process by which we learned to think about such ideas at all (185).

My study of *Othello*’s postcolonial reception and transformation is not about how Shakespeare saw race, but about how readers have seen race through Shakespeare. The identity of Othello in criticism and adaptation has vacillated between the extremes of ‘self’ and ‘other’ for the past four hundred years. Othello has been demonized in burlesques, normalized in opera, and praised or denigrated by critics for being variously ‘too African’ or ‘not African enough.’

Before the middle of the twentieth century, scholars who emphasized Othello’s heroism and nobility frequently did so in a way that downplayed, ignored, or outright changed the perception of race in the play. In her 1869 *Studies in Shakespeare*, Mary Preston characterizes Othello as “a man of a great and generous heart,” and emphasizes his nobility, but takes issue with his color:

I have always *imagined* [Othello as] *a white* man. It’s true the dramatist paints him black, but this shade does not suit the man. It is a stage decoration, which *my taste* discards...Shakespeare was too correct a delineator of human nature to have Othello *black*, if he had personally acquainted himself with the idiosyncrasies of the African race...Othello *was a white man!*  
(Preston, qtd. in *Women Reading Shakespeare*, 129)



As late as 1958, Gerald Bentley's introduction to his edition of *Othello* showed "near total inattention to Othello's skin color," mentioning only that "Othello is a man of action whose achievement was immediately obvious to an Elizabethan audience, in spite of his color and background" (Hendricks, 1). In 1961, Marvin Rosenberg gives a full page of critical questions about Othello's character before briefly wondering "what is the meaning of his dark skin?" (6). For critics who had negative associations with what dark skin should signify in a character, the idea of a noble moor was too much of a contradiction. Othello's skin color had to be denied, explained away, or minimized.

Guiseppe Verdi's 1887 opera *Otello* not only adapts Shakespeare's text to a different genre of performance—it also 'normalizes' the character of Othello by almost eliminating his otherness. The libretto, written in Italian by Arrigo Boito, removes nearly all of the references to Otello's race that can be found in Shakespeare's text. While many of Shakespeare's characters (including Desdemona) refer to Othello as "the moor," the only character in Verdi's opera to use the phrase "il moro" is Jago. Instead of "the moor of Venice," Verdi's Otello is known as the lion—"Leon di Venezia," "Leon de San Marco," or even "l'alato Leon" (Guiseppe Verdi: *Otello*). The winged lion of St. Mark represents the city of Venice, and statues of lions decorate many of Venice's prominent buildings. Calling Shakespeare's Othello "the moor" signifies both his race and his otherness; he is a stranger to Venice who has been trusted to lead the troops. Verdi's Othello, by contrast, is "l'alato Leon"—a symbol of Venice itself. By setting his opera entirely in Cyprus, Verdi reinforces the connections between Otello and Venice. Shakespeare's play begins in Venice, where Othello plays the dual roles of trusted general and exotic stranger. Othello's description of how he and Desdemona fell in love

comes only after Brabantio has accused Othello of witchcraft on the evidence that Desdemona would not “run from her guardage to the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou” (I.ii.71-2). In Verdi’s opera, by contrast, Otello is the leader of the Venetians in Cyprus, revered for his glorious victories in war, and his place of honor is never questioned. The story of Otello and Desdemona’s first meeting is told as private duet; they are reminiscing rather than defending their love. That Otello is a moor is inconsequential to the plot and barely mentioned. The audience’s attention is shifted from the issue of Otello’s race to a more normalized portrayal of a noble general. As a version of *Othello* that replaces rather than displaces, Verdi’s *Otello* removes much of the evidence of the Moorish ‘other’ to present Otello as a more European ‘self.’

For all the critics who overlook Othello’s race to emphasize his nobility and accomplishment, there are others who point to Othello’s race as an outrage or an explanation for the tragic events of the play. In his *Short View of Tragedie* (1693), Thomas Rymer expresses anger at Othello’s characterization:

Shall a Poet thence fancy that [the Venetians] will set a Negro to be their General, or trust a *Moor* to defend them against the *Turk*? With us a Black-a-moor might rise to be a Trumpeter, but *Shakespear* would not have him less than a Lieutenant-General. With us a *Moor* might marry some little drab, or Small-coal Wench: *Shake-spear* would provide him the Daughter and kin of some great Lord.  
(qtd. in Mason Vaughan’s *Othello*, 94)

Rymer’s frustration centers both on Othello’s apparent status in the Venetian military and his marriage to Desdemona: the very factors that prove his “whiteness” to critics such as Mary Preston. To be a moor and a general and married to a noblewoman seemed an impossible contradiction that must be resolved. John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States, wrote of Desdemona and Othello’s relationship: “Who can sympathize

with *Desdemona*?...She falls in love and makes a runaway match with a blackamoor, for no better reason than that he has told her a braggart story...When Othello smothers her in bed, the terror and pity subside immediately into the sentiment that she has her just deserts” (qtd. in Rosenberg, 207). Adams explains away the relationship by interpreting Othello as a cautionary tale—a warning for daughters who might decide to run off with “blackamoors.” For those who normalize Othello, Desdemona is praised for being able to see beyond his skin color to his ‘true’ nature, while those who demonize Othello’s race see their marriage as an abomination. In early scholarship, performance, and adaptation of Othello, the message seems consistent. If Othello is a hero, it is in spite of his race. If Othello is a villain, it is because of his race.

While Verdi emphasizes Othello’s nobility by minimizing his identity as a moor, comic versions of Othello performed on the burlesque stage portray him as a clown figure by using his race to play to stereotypes. In 1830’s London, Maurice Dowling’s *Othello Travestie* describes the character of Othello as “formerly an independent Nigger, from the Republic of Hayti” (4). If Verdi further elevates Othello’s speeches, Dowling seems more interested in debasing Othello’s words. Shakespeare’s Othello begins the defense of his marriage to Desdemona with the following words:

Most potent, grave, and reverend signors,  
My very noble and approved good masters:  
That I have ta’en away this old man’s daughter,  
It is most true; true, I have married her.  
The very head and front of my offending  
Hath this extent, no more (I:iii:78-83).

Dowling’s text transforms the same speech into the first verse of a song set to “Yankee Doodle:”

Potent, grave, and rev'rend sir  
Very noble Massa—  
When de maid a man prefer  
Den him no can pass her.  
Yes, it is most werry true  
Him take dis old man's daughter  
But no by spell, him promise you,  
But by fair means he caught her (13).

Dowling's *Othello* embodies stereotypes of slave language and behavior, and his character is played for laughs. The "very noble and approved good masters" of Shakespeare's play become the loaded term "Massa." While none of the characters in *Othello Travestie* speak in eloquent Shakespearean verse, Othello's language has been especially altered—transformed into "Negro Dialect," which was more characteristic of early American drama than English burlesque (Walser, 271). "This" and "that" become "dis" and "dat," and Othello regularly uses "him" instead of "he" or "I." Othello's dialect signals his 'otherness,' establishing him as an exotic and amusing curiosity.

Like Dowling's *Othello Travestie*, the *Othello* burlesque performed by the Griffin and Christie Minstrel troupe in New York in 1870 presents an Othello who reflects the stereotypes of the age. Iago, Brabantio, and Desdemona refer to him as "that nigger" throughout the play. But the Othello of the Griffin and Christie script represents a more sinister figure than the Othello from *Othello Travestie*. Where Dowling's Othello is bumbling and clown-like (he can't even kill Desdemona without messing up), the Griffin and Christie Othello is villainous and efficient. Even his motives for marrying Desdemona are suspect. His first lines come in the form of a song to the tune of "Dixie," in which he sings "Oh, Desdy, dear, now you're my wife. I mean to pass a happy life...and hand in hand, we'll take a stand to spend Brabantio's money" and he mocks

Brabantio by calling him ‘Dad’ (130). As his jealousy grows, he displays violent outbursts, giving Desdemona a black eye and declaring “I feel like tearin’ things” (137). The Griffin and Christie Desdemona and her love for Othello are also portrayed negatively; as she prepares for bed on the night of her death she scoffs that “I’ll have satisfaction on that nigger” before lying down and snoring (138). She dies “squalling” like an “old tom cat” and screaming “you can’t kill me,” while Othello cuts her off with a “damned if I don’t” (139). After Desdemona’s death, the play ends abruptly. Iago’s comeuppance and Othello’s remorse and suicide as he learns the truth are not included. Instead of a tragic love, the relationship between the Griffin and Christie Othello and Desdemona is dysfunctional and tumultuous.

Nineteenth-century adaptations of *Othello* tended to remove the ambiguities and potential complications of Shakespeare’s text. Dowling and the Griffin and Christie group take *Othello* from tragic to comic by resolving the problems expressed by critics who demonize Othello. In *Othello Travestie* and *Othello: A Burlesque*, Othello functions as a simple construction of the other; his race marks him as a clownish slave or a violent villain. The “gaps” in Shakespeare’s text are filled in with jokes and stereotypes to create crowd-pleasing mockeries of Othello. Verdi’s *Otello* similarly tackles the ambiguities in Shakespeare’s text by all but removing race from the equation. Like Bentley, Verdi imagines an Othello whose race is not a factor—a “lion” who is a representation of Venice rather than a stranger. Rather than present Othello as a complex blend of ‘self’ and ‘other,’ these authors make distinct choices to present more straightforward characterizations.

By contrast, late twentieth century critics and appropriators of Othello emphasized the very complexity of Othello's dual role as self and other. Othello is still seen by critics as an "other" in Venetian society, but interpretations of his culture increasingly reference his relationship with his native continent. Jacquelyn McLendon argues that Othello is not "connected with his African heritage," citing Caryl Phillips' observation that "there is no evidence of Othello having any black friends, eating any African foods, speaking any language other than theirs...From what we are given it is clear that he denied, or at least did not cultivate, his past" (127). This "past" is a key part of Othello's development as postcolonial figure; Othello has a cultural history, a context. And if Othello has left something behind by taking his roles as commander of the Venetian troops and Desdemona's husband, there is a rejection of a former culture in his assimilation. Similarly, Elliott Butler-Evans characterizes the stories of Anthropophagi and Cannibals that Othello uses to woo Desdemona as repetitions of "descriptions of non-Western others that characterized the discourse of the West," and asserts that this "self-defacement makes Othello less the 'Other' and more an outsider whose epistemological stance towards non-Westerners does not differ from that of the Venetians" (147). These critics do not fault Othello for being too much of an 'other' to deserve the role of hero; to them, he is not 'other' enough. His rejection of whatever his native culture is, his identification with the Venetians, and his love for the "fair" Desdemona mark him as a traitor to his own race

The critical hostility towards Othello's love of Desdemona is the inversion of the earlier critics' preoccupation with scrutinizing Desdemona's love for Othello. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century critics alternately praised and denounced Desdemona's love for

her husband. Her unrelenting devotion is taken as evidence that she is “worthy to be a hero’s bride” (Faucit Martin 50). Conversely, it’s also cited as a fatal flaw that leads Desdemona to her “just deserts.” The same critics who challenge or celebrate Desdemona’s love for Othello never follow up with an examination of why Othello loves Desdemona. For them, Othello’s love for a beautiful, high-born Venetian lady is self-evident—hardly worth commenting on. But for critics writing in the postcolonial late-twentieth century, the black Othello’s love for the white Desdemona is highly problematic. By loving Desdemona, by choosing a wife whose skin resembles “monumental alabaster,” is Othello rejecting his own culture and the women of his own race? It is the same question addressed in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* through the case of Jean Veneuse, who writes his fiancée wondering “whether, by marrying you, who are a European, I may not appear to be making a show of contempt for the women of my own race” (70). Sheila Rose Bland even takes Othello’s final speech as evidence of genuine insanity:

Then must you speak  
Of one who loved not wisely but too well;  
Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,  
Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,  
Like the base Judean,<sup>11</sup> threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe (V:ii:553-558).

Bland argues:

No human being of any race, in his right mind, would say such a thing about his own race! One white woman is worth more than all the black men, women, and children in the world? This is preposterous. This is

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<sup>11</sup> The Bevington edition of Shakespeare’s plays, which I use for all of the quotations in the dissertation, substitutes the Quarto’s “Indian” for the Folio’s Judean, suggesting that it refers to “an ignorant savage who cannot recognize the value of a precious jewel” (Bevington, 1200). Because the phrasing of Bland’s response is more in keeping with the term “Judean,” which she quotes in her text, I have used the term Judean to set up a quotation from her article.

laughable...Othello himself recognizes what an abomination he is—even to himself (34).

Just as Othello's place in Venetian society is taken as an implicit rejection of Africa and his Moorish identity, the value that Othello places on Desdemona is taken as a rejection of his own heritage. In Bland's interpretation, Othello is not the "Judean [who] threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe;" he is a black man who has denied his own race for the "pearl" of marriage to a white woman. The absence in *Othello* that Bland's criticism implies is not just the lack of black friends that Caryl Phillips observes—it is the lack of a black wife, black children, black community.

The blank space that represents Othello's culture before he became a Venetian by marriage is filled in by Djanet Sears' 1998 play *Harlem Duet*, which Sharon Friedman describes as a "critical reading of a contemporary Othello in the context of his personal history within a black community...clearly a meaningful absence in Shakespeare's play" (127). *Harlem Duet* is the story of Othello's first wife, Billie; it adapts the plot of Othello across three distinct time periods in New York: the Antebellum period, the Harlem Renaissance, and the late 1990s. Fischlin and Fortier argue that *Harlem Duet* "asks important questions about how inclusion and exclusion work for people who are part of the black community, something that *Othello*, with its emphasis on Othello's strangeness to white culture, emphatically does not" (286). *Harlem Duet* offers a distinct shift in perspective from Shakespeare's *Othello*. Rather than showing Othello as the single representative of his culture and emphasizing his place as the 'other,' Djanet Sears establishes Othello's blackness as the norm. Sears shows the world that Othello leaves behind when he enters the world of Desdemona (or the *Harlem Duet* equivalents, Miss



Dessy and Mona). The only character shown in *Harlem Duet* who isn't black is Mona; her appearance, like her whiteness, is elusive—the stage directions state that “we see nothing of her but brief glimpses of a bare arm and a waft of light brown hair” (297).

In each time period, Sears' Billie experiences the rejection for which postcolonial critics fault Othello as he leaves her for a white woman. The 1928 Billie asks her Othello “Do you love her?...Have you sung to her at twilight?...Does your blood call out her name?” and half a dozen other questions (Sears 290). To each question, the Othello of the Harlem Renaissance answers “yes,” but he has only silence for Billie's final question: “Is she White?” (290). His silence is her answer, and she confirms “she's White” (290). For Billie, Othello's love for Mona is made worse by Mona's whiteness; it becomes a blatant rejection of everything she stands for. When her friend Magi accuses her of racism, saying that “everything is about White people to you,” but Billie explains: “No, no, no...It's about Black. I love Black. I really do. And it's revolutionary...Black is beautiful...So beautiful” (313). In his discussion of “miscegenation” in Shakespeare's works, Robert Samuels explains that “Shakespeare tells us that in the old age, ‘black was not counted fair,’ and whiteness was considered the ideal” (44). Billie tries to reclaim the word black, rejecting the connections of beauty with words like ‘fair’ and ‘light.’ Her condemnation of Othello's love for Mona mirrors that of postcolonial critics of Shakespeare's Othello, arguing that by loving a white woman, he is denying his own culture.

Sears' Othello responds to her accusations by stating:

You want to know the truth? I'll tell you the truth. Yes, I prefer White women. They are easier, before and after sex...To a Black woman, I represent every Black man she has ever been with and with whom there

was still so much to work out. The White women I loved saw me—could see me (305).

Sears' Othello tries to argue that he has moved beyond race—that Billie's culture, the culture of black men and women, no longer belongs to him. He claims that "some of us are beyond that now. Spiritually beyond this race shit bullshit now...I am not my skin. My skin is not me" (305). But his reasons for choosing white women over black women are not about "rejecting categories of race" or being "beyond" racial identity. He wants to distance himself from the prejudices that his black skin inspires (in both blacks and whites) and instead embrace "his culture"—the culture of "Wordsworth, Shaw, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Dirty Harry*" (305). Being with a white woman means that he can enter her world, an "easy" world where he does not have to respond to the cultural pressures of being black.

In *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, Margaret Jane Kidney links the struggle of Sears' Othello to assimilate with Homi Bhabha's lines on mimicry: "almost the same, but not quite/ almost the same, but not white" (74). Through Mona, Sears' Othello can try to merge with her whiteness and deny his own blackness, but he is always limited by that "almost"—his otherness never quite disappears. S. E. Ogude makes the same case against Othello's love of Desdemona in his contribution to the collection

*Othello: New Essays by Black Writers*:

"Othello is indeed more in love with the whiteness of Desdemona's skin and the sweetness of her body than with her as a human being...Desdemona's life, Desdemona's worth, are embodied in her milk-white skin" (Ogude 161).

The whiteness of Desdemona's skin (or Mona's skin) is seen by postcolonial critics and characters alike as a way that Shakespeare's Othello or Sears' Othello can enter white

culture. In each of the three time periods of Sears' *Harlem Duet*, Othello leaves Billie in order to find a way to get closer to that whiteness.

The Billie of the 1860s kills her Othello to keep him from Miss Dessy, then holds his body in her arms as she tells the story:

Once upon a time, there was a man who wanted to find a magic spell in order to become White. After much research and investigation, he came across an ancient ritual from the caverns of knowledge of a psychic. 'The only way to become white,' the psychic said, 'was to enter the Whiteness.' And when he found his ice queen, his alabaster goddess, he fucked her. Her on his dick. He one with her, for a single shivering moment became...her. Her and her Whiteness (310).

The words of the Antebellum Billie are deliberately reminiscent of Fanon's opening to his chapter on "The Man of Color and the White Woman" in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*:

I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white.  
Now—and this is a form of recognitions that Hegel had not envisioned—who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me on the noble road that leads to total realization...  
I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.  
When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine (Fanon 63).

Both Sears and Fanon acknowledge (without condoning or advocating) the desire to achieve whiteness through love or through sex with a white woman. While Billie reduces this connection, this way of becoming "one" with a white woman, to the physical act of sex, the transformation that Fanon envisions is both a physical and a mental exchange. By acknowledging a black man as a suitable object of love, by recognizing him as 'worthy,' a white woman can bestow worthiness (or whiteness) upon him. By mastering a white woman sexually, a black man metaphorically masters or enters the white race. The

symbolism of a white woman who can confer whiteness and acceptance on a black man continues to resonate in other transformations of the Othello story, including Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*.

*The Satanic Verses* transforms the story of the Moorish stranger of Venice into the story of Indian immigrants in London. In the words of one minor character, "that play *Othello*...was really Attallah or Attullah except the writer couldn't spell" (256). Rushdie uses the relationship between Othello and Desdemona as a loaded symbol of "mixed marriage." Although Rushdie does not appropriate the character of Othello directly, *The Satanic Verses* resonates with Othello-figures and Desdemona-figures. The two Indian Othellos, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta find their Desdemonas in Pamela Lovelace and Alleluia Cone. For Saladin, the wealthy British Pamela is the key to leaving behind the Indian self that he wants to deny; he believes that if she does not love him "then his entire attempt at metamorphosis would fail" (50). In marrying Pamela, Saladin marries (in the words of Fanon) "white culture, white beauty, white whiteness" (Fanon 63). Pamela, however, is attracted to Saladin's exotic otherness, as Desdemona falls in love with Othello's tales of his travels and adventures.

Their marriage is doomed to fail, Pamela realizes, because it is "a marriage of cross-purposes, each of them rushing towards the very thing from which the other was in flight" (186). Rushdie demonstrates their incompatibility through their contradictory interpretations of *Othello*:

Saladin "had said, when courting Pamela, that *Othello*, 'just that one play,' was worth the total output of any other dramatist in any other language. Pamela, of course, made incessant efforts to betray her class and race,

and so, predictably, professed herself horrified, bracketing Othello with Shylock and beating the racist Shakespeare over the head with them” (412).

Saladin celebrates the image of the ‘othered’ figure of Othello who is accepted into Venetian culture through his marriage to Desdemona, as Saladin longs to be accepted into “the protean, inexhaustible culture of the English-speaking peoples” through his marriage to Pamela. Pamela, by contrast, speaks out against the glorification of ‘Englishness’ and Bardolatry like an early postcolonial critic, reading racism into the otherness of Shakespeare’s Othello and Shylock. Pamela and Saladin do not require an Iago-figure to break apart their marriage—it is inherently self-destructive. The bitterness that Saladin feels over his failed marriage contributes to Saladin’s decision to become an Iago-figure to the second Othello/Desdemona pairing: Gibreel and Allie.

*The Satanic Verses* is not the direct condemnation of *Othello* that a text like *Harlem Duet* is. But Rushdie’s modeling and reworking of the Othello/Desdemona relationship functions as a critique of more normalizing interpretations of *Othello*. Through the failure of Saladin, Rushdie challenges the idea that entering a new culture means rejecting the previous culture. In her brief description of *The Satanic Verses* as “more concerned with race than gender,” Marianne Novy argues that “both Othello and Iago are Indians—Gibreel and Saladin—in love with white women and their culture” (Novy 78). While Novy’s one-sentence assessment fits with Saladin’s obsession with stripping away his otherness and being accepted by “white women and their culture,” Gibreel’s relationship with Allie is not a self-destructive attempt to lose himself in ‘white culture.’

As the narrator of the story explains, Saladin and Gibreel are “two fundamentally different types of self” (441). Saladin represents “a willing reinvention” of the self, but Gibreel “has wished to remain, to a large degree, continuous—that is, joined to and arising from his past” (441). The relationship between Gibreel and Allie takes on the characteristics of a more positive interpretation of the Othello/Desdemona dynamic—a mixed marriage that respects both cultures. As a couple that embraces the hybridity of merging India/England, dark/light, fire/ice, they begin as a stronger couple than Saladin and Pamela (who both try to negate the self through marriage to the other). Rushdie argues that the novel “celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure” (Rushdie, qtd. in Appiah 112). When Saladin enters their relationship as an Iago-figure and preys on Gibreel by making him jealous, it is actually Saladin’s jealousy that rips the couple apart. He wants to be what he believes that Gibreel is: “the embodiment of all the good fortune that the Fury-haunted Chamcha so signally lacked” (443). He also wants what he believes Gibreel has: the “invented-resented Allie, that drop-dead blonde or femme fatale conjured up by his envious, tormented, Oresteian imagination” (444). In this reinterpretation of the Othello story, Iago’s resentment of Othello is not that of a European insider who brings about the fall of the Moorish other. Instead, Rushdie presents an Iago who hates his Othello’s otherness in a kind of self-hatred. *The Satanic Verses* displaces Shakespeare’s Iago, Othello, and Desdemona both by recasting their roles in contemporary London and by giving his characters their own critical commentary on *Othello*. In writing *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie does not overwrite or override

Shakespeare's version of the story. Shakespeare functions instead as a recognizable means by which issues of race, envy, hatred, and hybridity can be explored.

Like Othello, Shakespeare's Shylock has taken on a life of his own, evolving in the public imagination as attitudes towards Jewish communities in Europe and the Americas changed. Marjorie Garber explains, "Shylock evolved over the years from a comic butt to a full-fledged villain, and then, gradually, to a victim of prejudice whose actions were explainable, if not excusable, because of the way he was treated by Venetian society" (*Shakespeare and Modern Culture* 146). John O'Connor's *Shakespearean Afterlives*, which chronicles Shakespearean characters "with lives of their own," gives its longest chapter to Shylock (without even mentioning Othello or Caliban). O'Connor's evaluation hinges again on the flexible nature of the interpretations—how some audiences see the play as "not nearly anti-Semitic enough" and others see it as an offensive abomination. In his examination of the ways that *The Merchant of Venice* has been performed in Israel and Nazi Germany, Laurence Lerner suggests that, instead of maintaining that Shakespeare himself wrote with political agendas ranging from the sympathetic to the anti-Semitic, "it was the various countries and societies that were enterprising, helping themselves to his plays and interpreting them as they wished or felt compelled to" (143). The potential for wildly differing interpretations of Shylock (from demonized to normalized to even glorified) is yet another reminder of the various gaps in Shakespeare's texts. For each interpretation, there is often a textual justification, a way of presenting any given Shylock as 'Shakespeare's intended Shylock.'

If the early productions of *Othello* were more prone to 'normalizing' the other, early productions of *The Merchant of Venice* tended to 'demonize.' Shylock's role as the

other was exaggerated, mocked. The character of Shylock was presented as an evil ‘alien’ whose otherness (Jewishness) separated him from the Christian ‘selves’ in the play. Actors depicted Shylock as “a repulsive clown or, alternatively, as a monster of unrelieved evil” (Adler 341). The lines which might have rendered Shylock more sympathetic, such as the “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech, were frequently cut from the productions or played for comic effect. In Gareth Armstrongs’s twentieth-century play *Shylock*, he looks back on the history of the play and describes the practice to the audience:

Comic figures. That’s what we were. That’s what was expected of Jews on stage—comedy and villainy. Comic not because we told jokes...but comic because people enjoyed laughing *at* us. To our first audience, Shakespeare’s first audience, that’s what we were—comic villains (23).

This interpretation of Shylock as the comic villain, an object of hatred and mockery, had a lasting impact on the way the character was received, performed and transformed. As late as 1910 Gerolamo Lo Savio’s silent film *Il Mercante di Venezia* portrayed Shylock as a vice-figure, chuckling wickedly after getting Antonio to sign the bond and delightedly sharpening a knife in the trial scene. To establish Shylock as nothing more than a one-dimensional villain, Shakespeare’s text must be transformed, taking away some of the more ambiguous passages and plotlines.

In 1701, a new version of *The Merchant of Venice* was introduced by playwright George Granville. Granville’s version, entitled *The Jew of Venice*, “displaced Shakespeare’s version on the stage from 1701 until 1741” (Proudfoot 831). Like Tate’s *King Lear*, Granville’s version of the text was designed to appeal to the audiences of his



own time, and one of his strategies involved making Shylock's role as comic villain more prominent. Catherine Craft explains:

He achieved this end by developing the light, happy plot that remained once he had stripped Shakespeare's [Merchant] of all its dark colorings...Where Shakespeare introduced dark elements into his play by examining the strife between Christians and Jews which surrounded the Venetian friends and lovers, Granville presented a comic villain to forward his plot (Craft qtd in Schneider).

Granville's version of the play introduces a new scene where Shylock tells Bassanio and Antonio that "I have a mistress that out-shines 'em all...O may her charms increase and multiply; my money is my mistress! Here's to interest upon interest" (Granville 12).

Unlike Shakespeare's Shylock, Granville's Shylock is not a character who would value love over money, or Leah's ring above "a wilderness of monkeys" (III.i.115). As Ben Ross Schneider argues, Granville uses this toast scene to establish the tension between the love and friendship praised by the Christian characters and Shylock's base greed.

Shylock's toast to "interest upon interest" surfaces again later in Granville's version, during the trial scene. Granville, who leaves much of Shakespeare's text intact for his version, chooses to leave out Bassanio's claim that he would sacrifice "life itself, my wife, and all the world" to save Antonio (IV.i.82). The following exchange from Shakespeare's version is also omitted:

Gratiano: I have a wife who, I protest, I love;  
          I would she were in heaven, so she could  
          Entreat some power to change this currish Jew.  
Nerissa: 'Tis well you offer it behind her back;  
          The wish would make else an unquiet house.  
Shylock: These be the Christian husbands. I have a daughter;  
          Would any of the stock of Barabbas  
          Had been her husband rather than a Christian! (IV.i.288-95)

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the “Christian husbands” come off badly in this conversation, and the tension is between love and friendship rather than friendship and money.

Granville’s Bassanio makes a serious offer to give his own life for Antonio’s, saying that he will give “every piece” of his own flesh in exchange for just one pound of Antonio’s. He explains that this exchange would be to Shylock’s benefit: “Here’s interest upon interest in the flesh” (Granville 35). Granville’s Shylock then establishes himself as an even more unmerciful villain than Shakespeare’s, explaining that he will have the lives of both Antonio and Bassanio when he takes his pound of flesh:

I know thee well.  
When he has paid the forfeit of his bond  
Thou canst not choose but hang thyself for being  
The cause. And so my ends are served on both (Granville 35).

Granville’s Shylock does not just want to kill Antonio—he wants to use the deep friendship between Antonio and Bassanio to kill another Christian. While Granville does not change much of Shakespeare’s text, the changes he does make set up stricter binaries of good/evil, friendship/greed, Christian/Jew, self/other.

In the nineteenth century, *The Merchant of Venice* was frequently re-written for shorter, more comic performances, especially for the burlesque stage circuit. At least a dozen burlesque adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* exist, with most of them reworking Shakespeare’s play with the same formula. These plays are usually named after Shylock, and much of the action at Belmont is cut, putting the emphasis on the money-lending plot. Shylock’s most sympathetic speeches are also removed, and new speeches are added to emphasize his dual roles as villain and central character. These burlesque Shylocks reached the height of their popularity in the early nineteenth century,

at the time that Shylock began to be celebrated as a more sympathetic and dramatic character by renowned Shakespearean actor Edmund Kean. In his *Shylock on the Stage*, Toby Lelyveld cites *The Theatrical Observer*'s description of the "anguish," "feeling," and "perfect stillness" of Kean's Shylock as evidence of "Kean's sympathetic, and even compassionate treatment of Shylock. For the first time, the stage-Jew was taking on human form, and for the first time the audience was able to appreciate it" (45). Similarly, Henry Irving's characterization of Shylock in 1878 went even further towards giving the character some depth; his costume and manner were more subtle than the exaggerated villains of the earlier tradition or even the emphatic style of Kean. Alan Hughes argues that in Irving's performance, "despite his evidently evil intentions, Shylock's dignity in the face of Christian arrogance quickly won the sympathy of the audience" (254). The 'replacement' texts of burlesque authors such as Talfourd or the Griffin and Christie troupe function as an implicit criticism of a sympathetic or tragic portrayal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. As *The Merchant of Venice* is rewritten for comedy or burlesque troupes, the authors strip away the means by which Shylocks's otherness is made tragic and sympathetic by actors and directors of Shakespeare's play.

Francis Talfourd's *Shylock: The Jerusalem Hearty-Joke* recreates *The Merchant of Venice* as a burlesque musical. The casket scenes at Belmont are conflated into a single scene and Shylock's role is doubled to accommodate the need for the songs and comedy that characterize burlesque. A new scene is added in which Shylock (comically drunk after his dinner with Antonio) craftily plots his revenge after he discovers that his daughter has stolen his gold and run away with Lorenzo (to the tune of "pop-goes-the-weasel"). Rather than cutting the "hath not a Jew eyes?" speech, Talfourd modifies it by

having Shylock say “a kick, as to a Christian, gives us pain” while kicking his friend Tubal to demonstrate. Talfourd’s re-creates Shylock as a two-dimensional villain, to be laughed at and hated rather than pitied. Burlesque plays such as these took the interpretations of Shylock prevalent in Shakespearean performances of the time and brought them to the forefront, removing any of the Shakespearean source material that makes it difficult to interpret the role comically.

If the nineteenth century vacillated between discovering a more sympathetic portrayal of Shylock and reducing the character to the comic butt of burlesque jokes, the twentieth century had an even more complicated relationship with “The Jew” of Venice. Marjorie Garber explains that *The Merchant of Venice* was troubling because:

Twentieth-century audiences (and actors and directors) have wanted their Shakespeare to share their own humane and ethical views. Their Shakespeare could not be an anti-Semite, so the play must contain a strong subtext that points towards his ‘real’ opinions about universal human rights, dignity, and generosity (*Shakespeare and Modern Culture* 127).

In order to avoid branding Shakespeare an anti-Semite,<sup>12</sup> readers of *The Merchant of Venice* found ways to exonerate Shylock or condemn the Christian characters in the play. Passages which show the Christian characters in a negative light (the very passages that Granville removed from his play *The Jew of Venice* to create a more comic atmosphere) were dusted off by twentieth-century critics to prove that Shylock is as much victim as villain. Richard Halpern cites René Girard’s argument that Shylock functions as a double of the Christian characters (and Antonio in particular) as a distinctly modernist approach

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<sup>12</sup> If British and American audiences of the early twentieth century were worried that Shakespeare’s portrayal of Shylock might have been too anti-Semitic, directors in Nazi Germany seem to have worried that it was not anti-Semitic enough. S. P. Cerasano explains in the Routledge sourcebook that in the years between 1932 and 1939 the average number of annual performances of *Merchant of Venice* dropped from about 200 to only three. Among the reasons Cerasano cites for the shift is the “element of instability within the play; namely, that there was always the chance that the audience would sympathize with Shylock, ‘which would have been suicidal’ (106).

to *The Merchant of Venice*. Halpern explains that “Venetian society scapegoats Shylock not because he is its ‘other,’ but because he is its unflattering mirror...Girard’s reading will therefore insist not that Shylock is better than he appears to be, but that the Christians are as bad as he appears to be” (178-9). Even authors who label Shakespeare as an anti-Semite tread lightly with the accusation, as Norma Rosen does by arguing that “in the matter of anti-Semitic portraits, Shakespeare’s Shylock is probably as sympathetic and enlightened as we can hope to have. Shakespeare’s Jew is not demonic: he is governed by cause and effect. His poisoned soul has its reasons” (77). Particularly when it comes to interpreting the character of Shylock, even criticism seems to take on the qualities of adaptation, with scholars readjusting the play to adhere more closely to their own cultural ideals.

Like postcolonial adaptations that explore and even celebrate the otherness that Othello or Caliban represent, most twentieth-century adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* give a much richer depiction of the Jewish community in Venice than the early burlesque adaptations or Granville’s comedy do. While the burlesque authors were content to present Shylock as the quintessential Jewish villain, authors in the twentieth century were careful to present Shylock as one man in a diverse community. Gareth Armstrong’s one-man play *Shylock* (1999) tells the story of *The Merchant of Venice* from the point of view of Shylock’s friend, the minor character Tubal. Armstrong explains his choice in the introduction to his text:

Tubal? He’s crucial. He may have only one short scene, but there’s no one else in the play who shows Shylock any sympathy. No one else in the play, including his faithless daughter, who shares his Jewishness. He would have to be the conduit for my play (10).

By shifting Shylock to the side (literally, in some scenes), Armstrong challenges the idea that Shylock is a direct representation of Jewishness. In Armstrong's version, Shylock is *a Jew*, but Shylock is not *the Jew*, taking the weight of the identity of an entire race off of one single character. Through Tubal, Armstrong suggests a vibrant Jewish community, rather than the solitary Jewish outsider (as Shylock is sometimes played). To find fault with Shylock in Armstrong's play is not to find fault with all Jews or to find fault with Shakespeare—by examining the text of Shakespeare's play, Armstrong makes the case for Shylock the individual, as opposed to Shylock the symbol.

Scattered throughout Armstrong's play are selected speeches of Shylock's from *The Merchant of Venice*, which Armstrong performs as Shylock. But those performances are then de-centered as Tubal steps forward to explain them to the audience. Shylock's initial description of the bond is followed by Tubal's disclaimer:

A joke. I thought it was only a joke...Even the notary was laughing—and usually you need an appointment to make a joke with them...At this stage I didn't realize just how bitter Shylock was. Not without reason, of course. In that scene, even while Antonio was asking Shylock for money he was calling him a devil, threatening him, laughing at him—laughing at *us* (23).

Armstrong's Tubal, like MacDonald's Constance is part character, part literary critic.

Tubal effectively removes the idea of a vast Jewish conspiracy against Antonio by describing Shylock's plan as initially perceived as a joke. Tubal's "I didn't realize" implies that if he, or the notary, or anyone else had understood exactly what Shylock was up to, then things might have turned out differently. But Tubal's commentary implicates Antonio as much as Shylock. While Shylock's actions are not excused by Tubal, Shylock's bitterness is; Antonio is charged with the bad behavior he exhibits in the scene, even if the audience hears only Shylock's lines. Tubal's balanced interpretation of the

action surfaces again at the beginning of Act II, as he describes Shylock's behavior after Antonio's arrest. Tubal explains that "Antonio and his Gaoler came looking for Shylock, to try to reason with him. I'd like to have reasoned with him. But Tubal's had his eight lines" (41). Here Armstrong again establishes his play as a displacing text that enters into a dialogue with Shakespeare's play. Tubal, as a non-Shylock representative of the Venetian Jewish community, wants to reason with Shylock, to counsel him to stop. But Tubal is constrained by Shakespeare's text, limited to the lines Shakespeare wrote for him. *Shylock* offers the audience a close look at the lines of Shakespeare's play (both Tubal's and Shylock's), but Armstrong's interpretation goes beyond textual analysis. Looking at performance, popular culture, critical reception, Armstrong's play tackles the cultural resonances of the character of Shylock, from Shakespeare's time to today.

In writing *Shylock*, Gareth Armstrong follows in the footsteps of an earlier playwright who appropriated Shakespeare's Shylock: Arnold Wesker, who wrote *The Merchant* in 1977. Both authors indicate a recognition that the very word 'Shylock' has become its own form of discourse, a way of using Shakespeare to make a statement about what it means to be Jewish. In the first few lines of Armstrong's play, Tubal concedes that "it's Shylock that people remember of course...Shylock. He's even become a noun. That's only happened to one other Shakespeare character. 'A Romeo.' 'A Shylock'" (16). Armstrong's lines echo a comment of Wesker's from the preface to his play: "Shylock has entered the language. To be called it is to be insulted for being mean like a Jew" (Liv). Both authors understand that by appropriating the character of Shylock, they are talking back not just to Shakespeare's text, but to Shylock's afterlife. Shylock is problematic for postcolonial critics and authors not just because Shakespeare cast a Jew

as a villain, but because the general public has been using Shylock to cast Jews in the role of a villain for centuries. While Armstrong's *Shylock* hinges on analyzing Shakespeare's Shylock and the historical reception of the character, Wesker's *The Merchant* emphasizes transformation.

To find the play's message, Wesker's editor Glenda Leeming looks to the alterations that Wesker makes to the text—the creative dissonance between Wesker's *Merchant* and Shakespeare's. Leeming explains, “over the whole play, then the effect of the changes is clear—it becomes an indictment of man's inhumanity to man, especially Jewish man” (xxiii). For Wesker, the inherent anti-Semitism of Shakespeare's text demands a response. Although Wesker adds the disclaimer “I revere Shakespeare, am proud to write in his shadow,” he maintains that Shakespeare's depiction of Shylock is unbearable:

Nothing will make me admire it, nor has anyone persuaded me the holocaust is irrelevant to my responses...The portrayal of Shylock offends me for being a lie about the Jewish character. I seek no pound of flesh but, like Shylock, I'm unforgiving, unforgiving of the play's contribution to the world's astigmatic view and murderous hatred of the Jew (L).

Wesker's more sympathetic Shylock is a thoughtful and kind old man who is friends with Antonio; he even bears the anti-Semitic slurs of Antonio's godson Bassanio with patience. But the most important change that Wesker makes to the character of Shylock is the addition of his interactions with the rich Jewish community of 1560s Venice. Like Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet*, Wesker's *The Merchant* shows one of Shakespeare's outsiders among his own people. In Wesker's play, Shylock is not “the Jew”—he is one of many Jews in the Ghetto Nuovo, and the dramatic tension of the play rests in Shylock's obligations to that community.



In his preface, Wesker explains that his first inspiration for *The Merchant* came as he watched the trial scene in a 1973 production of *The Merchant of Venice*. As Portia announced the loophole in the bond's language, Wesker recounts:

I was struck with an insight. The real Shylock would not have torn his hair out and raged against not being allowed to have his pound of flesh, but would have said 'Thank God!' The point of writing a play in which Shylock would utter these words would be to explain how he became involved in such a bond in the first place (Liii).

The bond of Wesker's Shylock, which begins as a joke, quickly becomes a 'rock and a hard place' situation that Shylock cannot resolve on his own. He wants to forgive the loan or invalidate the bond, but doing so establishes a precedent. If Shylock's bond can be broken, so can any bond between a Christian and a Jew. Either Antonio must die, or the Jews of Venice risk losing their legal rights and livelihoods. Shylock's sister Rivka spells it out for him: "Everyone in the Ghetto...will be divided, as you are, my clever brother. Who to save—your poor people or your poor friend?" (58). When Wesker's Portia makes her declaration, his Shylock does indeed cry out "Thank God!" and he does not show anger over Portia's judgment even when it means he is convicted of plotting against the life of a citizen. Her judgment means that he does not have to sacrifice his friend or his people—just his own happiness. James C. Bulman argues that Wesker "creates a moral dilemma that hinges on Shylock's responsibility to (and for) the Jewish community—and, in so doing, he demonstrates an awareness that for four centuries Shylock has been made to shoulder that responsibility" (149). This is Shylock's afterlife—to serve (for better or worse) as a representative for the Jewish community. Whether academics or adapting authors embrace or resist it, Shakespeare's 'others' serve as symbols for their

race. One can use Shylock to address the whole range of Jewish otherness, just as authors such as Sears and Rushdie use Othello to discuss the otherness of minority cultures.

The characters of Othello and Shylock, as much as they have been transformed and reinterpreted, represent fixed forms of the other—the “Moor” and the “Jew” are named in the text. Caliban’s historical journey has taken a more roundabout path on the way to ‘postcolonial symbol.’ While it is easy to read the conversations between Prospero and Caliban as a debate between the colonizer and the colonized, only a few readers of Shakespeare even suggested the connection before the late 1800s, and there is no indication that these ideas were present in early performances of the play. Alden Vaughan reports that, “If Shakespeare meant Caliban to personify America’s natives, his intention apparently miscarried almost completely for nearly three centuries...[in productions of *The Tempest*] he evolved generally and gradually from a drunken beast in the late seventeenth century, to a fishy monster in the eighteenth, to an apish missing link in the nineteenth” (138). This evolution is mirrored in the ways that Caliban has been redefined and re-written by adapters of *The Tempest*. Over time, the names of Prospero and Caliban have become synonymous with the terms ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized,’ with associations ranging colonialism, post-colonialism, Africa, the Caribbean, Native Americans, racism, and slavery. The story has also inspired several adaptations and spin-offs of Shakespeare’s text, each bringing a new dimension to the relationship between Caliban and Prospero.

John Dryden and William Davenant rewrote Shakespeare’s *Tempest* for Restoration audiences in 1670 as *The Tempest; or, The Enchanted Island*. Dryden and

Davenant's attitude towards Shakespeare can be seen from the opening lines of their prologue to *The Enchanted Island*:

As when a Tree's cut down the secret root  
Lives under ground, and thence new Branches shoot  
So, from old Shakespear's honour'd dust, this day  
Springs up and buds a new reviving Play (Dryden and Davenant).

Like Tate, who sees Shakespeare as “a Heap of Jewels, unstrung and unpolisht” (Tate, Preface), and Granville, who brings the character of Shakespeare himself in for a prologue, Dryden and Davenant establish themselves as Shakespeare's heirs. *The Enchanted Island* is described as a new “off-shoot” that replaces Shakespeare's fallen tree. Dryden and Davenant keep a lot of Shakespeare's language intact, but additional characters and scenes are added, giving Caliban a sister named Sycorax. The additional scenes, and the added characters of Sycorax, Hippolito, and Dorinda set up a stark contrast between innocence and corruption, the European ‘selves’ and the monstrous ‘otherness’ of Caliban and Sycorax.

In Dryden and Davenant's play, Caliban is hardly portrayed as an innocent victim of an unjust colonial rule—he is presented as fiendish monster. Speeches that might inspire sympathy for Caliban, such as the haunting “be not afeared, the isle is filled with noises” (III.ii.136) are cut from the play. Instead of a fully developed character, Caliban becomes “the epitome of monstrosity, a non-human symbol of human iniquity” (Mason Vaughan, 392). While the Dryden/Davenant version of the play does include a ‘noble savage’ character named Hippolito, he is not a native of the island. Instead, he is the “prince of Mantua,” raised from infancy by Prospero and kept apart even from Prospero's daughters to preserve his noble innocence. Hippolito, Miranda, and Dorinda

(Miranda's sister, another added character), are portrayed as innocents on an Eden-esque island, who do not know the difference between men and women or where children come from. Caliban and Sycorax are drunken, gluttonous, and filled with lust, and Trinculo reports that he has seen Sycorax "under an Elder-tree, upon a sweet Bed of Nettles, singing Tory, Rory, and Ranthum, Scantum, with her own natural Brother" (Dryden and Davenant). In contrast to Hippolito, who is revered by the other characters in the play and seen as an idyllic vision of a man free of sin, Caliban embodies sin and inspires nothing but repugnance and alienation.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Caliban's portrayal onstage had graduated from the burlesque and the grotesque to the tragic. Patrick argues that at this time "Caliban was no longer a comic butt; he had become 'a creature, in his nature possessing all of the rude elements of the savage, yet maintaining in his mind, a strong resistance to that tyranny which held him in the thrall of slavery'" (Mason Vaughan and Vaughan, 103). The play *Caliban*, written by Ernest Renan in 1878 reflects the shift towards identifying Caliban as a symbol of rebellion in the face of authority. Renan's reinterpretation of the character comes somewhat higher on the evolutionary ladder than the Caliban of *The Enchanted Island*. While Caliban is still seen as an "other" who serves a reflection of some of the more negative characteristics of humanity, Renan's Caliban is no longer simply a degenerate monster. Instead, Renan portrays Caliban as a symbol of the cyclical nature of revolution. Set as a sequel to Shakespeare's play, Renan's drama chronicles Caliban's journey to depose Prospero in Milan in order to gain his own freedom. Caliban is seen as a force for the common people throughout the play, challenging the authority of

Prospero over the population of Milan. For Renan, Caliban functions as a symbol of the base masses, and his success as a revolutionary prompts another character to muse:

The inferior races, however, such as the emancipated negro, evidence at once a monstrous ingratitude towards their civilizers. When they succeed in throwing off the yoke of slavery they treat them as tyrants, imposters, and exploiters of mankind (65-6).

Once Prospero is deposed and Caliban is elected in his place, Caliban simply takes over Prospero's role as oppressive authority. As one of Caliban's plebian subjects laments after Caliban takes power, "we believe that the world changes, but it is always the same thing" (70). In both Renan's play and *The Enchanted Island*, Caliban is re-written as a symbol for the failings of mankind; he comes to represent human lust, depravity, anger, and the need for power. For these interpreters of *The Tempest*, the monstrous figure of the other is truly just a dark reflection of the worst aspects of the self. Just as Shakespeare's Prospero claims ownership of Caliban by stating "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (V.i.278-9), the trend of writing Caliban as a figure of sin, resistance, and destruction means acknowledging the presence of these flaws in the self.

The mid-twentieth century represents a significant shift in the treatment of the character of Caliban, both in performances and adaptations of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Rather than presenting Caliban as a monstrous and sinful 'other' who must be incorporated into Prospero's 'self,' Caliban begins to emerge as a character in his own right, both on the stage and the page. More literary critics and social scientists were looking to *The Tempest* and seeing similarities to the colonial situation, most notably in Octave Mannoni's exploration of *The Psychology of Colonization*, which contained a lengthy comparison of the profiles of the colonizer and the colonized and their literary

counterparts, Prospero/Caliban and Robinson Crusoe/ Friday. The comparison made enough of an impact that, when the book was reprinted in English, the title was changed to *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (Mannoni). As a result, the character of Caliban became highly politicized, both in performance and adaptation. Before this time, costumers frequently presented Caliban as a deformed creature, or even as a human/animal hybrid, to emphasize his monstrous nature. By the 1960's and 70's, the role of Caliban was often performed by an actor of color, and the costuming usually indicated some attempt at creating "native dress." As Virginia Mason Vaughan notes, "Caliban was now a black militant, angry and recalcitrant" ("Something Rich and Strange," 403).

It was in this political atmosphere that Aimé Césaire, a poet, dramatist, and politician from Martinique, chose to re-write Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in 1969. Césaire's *Une Tempête* (*A Tempest*) is subtitled "adaptation pour un théâtre negre." Like Caliban, Césaire uses the language of the conqueror to curse; he transforms *The Tempest* into a harsh condemnation of colonialism, with Caliban as the protagonist who opposes the petty, paranoid, and tyrannical Prospero. Prospero is the colonizer and the villain, and Caliban is the heroic and oppressed colonized subject. Like Renan, Césaire shows Caliban as a force of resistance, rebelling against the oppression of Prospero's stolen authority. But while Renan eventually draws a parallel between the two characters by establishing that each revolution produces a new tyrant, Césaire draws only distinctions. *Une Tempête* is a study in opposites: black/white, right/wrong, hero/villain, colonized/colonizer. But Césaire's interpretation of these strict binaries is postcolonial rather than colonial. Where texts such as Octave Mannoni's *The Psychology of*

*Colonization* presents the colonizers as self and the colonized as other, Césaire establishes Caliban as the self and center of the play.

Writing in 1985, Virginia Mason Vaughan argues that the 1980's represent "the climax of Caliban's politicization...in the popular imagination, Caliban now represented any group that felt itself oppressed" ("Something Rich and Strange" 404). Coming three years later, in 1988, Phillip Osment's play *This Island's Mine* takes these ideas even further. *This Island's Mine* chronicles the struggles of a group of Londoners in the 1980's who consider themselves 'outside of the mainstream' because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. The "island" in question is the United Kingdom, and (like Shakespeare's Caliban) Osment's outsider characters want to stake a claim to their native land. Just as Salman Rushdie uses critical interpretations of *Othello* in *The Satanic Verses*, Osment uses a rehearsal for a production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to explore the differing interpretations of the Prospero/Caliban dynamic. The director berates Selwyn, an actor who is 'othered' by both his race and his sexuality, for trying to make Caliban into a heroic character:

Selwyn, darling.  
Caliban is a primitive,  
He tried to rape Miranda,  
So don't try to give us the noble savage,  
It just won't work,  
It's an oversimplification,  
It will destroy the balance of the play.  
Prospero is the hero,  
Not Caliban (Osment, 263).

The director's interpretation of *The Tempest* finds parallels in most of the scattered scenes that make up *This Island's Mine*. A gay schoolboy is mocked by his classmates. A gay waiter is fired when his coworkers "express concern about working with [him]"

(263). A gay man is beaten in the street. The ‘othered’ characters in the play try to take their places at the center of society, but they are continuously pushed to the side by classmates, managers, and directors who implicitly tell them that the island is not theirs. There is not a single, central Caliban figure in the text. Instead, each character embodies the pain and oppression that characterize Caliban in one way or another.

Two more recent productions that re-write *The Tempest*, Teatro Buendia’s *Otra Tempestad* (1999) and the National Theatre’s *Stormbringer* (2007), take their cues from Césaire and center Caliban even more. Both productions begin with the birth of Caliban rather than the shipwreck, and both productions end with Caliban taking control of the island in some way. Caliban’s mother Sycorax becomes a powerful nature goddess rather than an exiled witch. The productions follow his point of view as he interacts with Prospero, first intrigued by Prospero’s mirrors and machines from the new world, then learning to embrace the identity of the island itself. In both productions, Caliban functions as the self, a character who must evolve over the course of the play, making decisions that ultimately decide the fates of both Prospero and Miranda (and, in the case of *Otra Tempestad*, a whole host of other Shakespearean characters).

Like Césaire’s *Une Tempête*, Carrió’s *Otra Tempestad* clearly transforms Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Taking a postcolonial perspective to a text that has been used to justify and define colonialism, both Césaire and Carrió adapt the relationships between Caliban and Prospero to reflect a different interpretation of the self and the other. But Carrió’s text construes otherness more broadly, appropriating characters from Yoruban myth and from some of Shakespeare’s other plays. In *Otra Tempestad*, the otherness that Prospero tries to impose on Caliban is offset by a multicultural cast of



characters, including Othello, Shylock, Macbeth, Hamlet, and three Yoruban goddesses. Instead of emphasizing the strict divisions between colonizer and colonized, as Césaire does in *Une Tempête*, Carrió presents a mestizo culture, blending the Old World with the (Brave) New World. In the thirty years between Césaire's interpretation of *The Tempest* and Carrió's, postcolonialism has moved from a harsh negation of colonial ideas to a more complex sense of hybrid cultures. This hybridity, which Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin describe as "the range of psychological as well as physiological mixings generated by colonial encounters" exemplifies the way that Carrió treats Shakespeare (7). In the following chapters, I will explore the ways that Carrió and Césaire rework Shakespeare's plots and characters to express their own unique brands of postcolonialism.

From Shakespeare to Césaire and Carrió, Caliban's journey is one of many twists and turns; he has been a monster, a demon, a revolutionary, an animal, a colonized subject, and (finally) a man. The ideas of colonialism and post-colonialism have helped to define the character, and the incorporation of Shakespeare's text into the criticism of postcolonial studies has helped to define the theory itself. But the afterlives of Shakespeare's Caliban, Othello and Shylock, are more than just the story of colonialism; they are chronicles of the way that the concept of the "other" has evolved for readers and writers. To justify Wesker's *The Merchant*, Alan Sinfield explains:

People sometimes say: "But why tinker with Shakespeare? Why not write a totally new play?" I think *The Merchant of Venice* is sufficiently interesting, and its topic sufficiently important, to indicate the answer. The racism of *The Merchant of Venice*—for all that criticism can unearth qualifications, hesitations, and complexities—must not be ignored...Shakespeare is a powerful cultural token, and hence a place where meaning is established and where it must be contested" (qtd in Rozett 47-8).

Sinfield's answer to the question "why tinker with Shakespeare" explains why "displacement" can be such an important tool in postcolonial criticism and adaptation. Shakespeare's "cultural force" and the audience's familiarity give his characters an immediate resonance that would be difficult to achieve through a new character. Othello, Shylock, and Caliban have occupied "a place where meaning is established," and their names have been used to reinforce negative views of otherness in society. It is therefore through Othello, Shylock, and Caliban that meanings of "African," "Jewish," or "Colonized" otherness can be contested and reworked.

### SECTION III: CHAPTER I

#### RACE AND REBELLION IN POSTCOLONIAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

##### UNE TEMPÊTE BY AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

In 1950, Prospero and Caliban were designated the original and definitive models of the colonizer and the colonized in Octave Mannoni's *The Psychology of Colonization* (later reprinted as *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*). Mannoni characterized Prospero as an "escapist" with a "settler mentality" (12). Caliban became known as the "monstrous and terrifying" other, characterized by "his 'evil' instincts" and his utter dependence on Prospero (104, 117). Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* takes back the metaphor of *The Tempest* as a means of inverting the power structure and characterization given by Mannoni. Césaire de-centers Prospero, stripping him of his absolute power and knowledge and revealing his vulnerability. Caliban becomes the hero of the new work, moving from an objectified 'other' to a powerful subject capable of taking back the island that is rightfully his. In Césaire's text, it is not Caliban who is characterized by his dependence—it is Prospero, who depends on Caliban for his own identity. *Une Tempête* is a violent separation from, and rejection of colonialism and traditional colonialist interpretations of otherness. By rewriting Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as '*A' Tempest*, Césaire not only offers a critical reading of Shakespeare's

play—he challenges the way that Shakespeare has been used to control and label the world’s colonized.

The way that Césaire casts Caliban as the hero also establishes him as a ‘self’ separate from Prospero. The point of view changes in Césaire’s text—we are not experiencing the island through Prospero’s eyes. Caliban is the center, and the audience experiences his life on the fringe. He does not merge Prospero and Caliban, showing Caliban as a shadow-self; in fact, his portrayal of the two characters is in direct defiance of that interpretation. Caliban rejects the lies that Prospero has told him, the superiority that Prospero has claimed, the self-hatred that Prospero’s ideas made him feel, and any power that Prospero holds over him. Césaire makes it clear that Prospero is not the one with power over Caliban—in fact, Caliban is the stronger of the two. Prospero has grown so accustomed to his role as a colonizer that he has become addicted to it. Where Shakespeare’s Prospero was able to leave the island and the magic behind, Césaire’s Prospero chooses to remain behind and attempt to gain Caliban’s worship and servitude. Memmi explains this desire by stating that if the colonizer “should go home...he would cease to be a superior man. Although he is everything in the colony, the colonialist knows that in his own country...he would be a mediocre man” (Memmi 61). Césaire’s Prospero wants to use Caliban as a way to escape that mediocrity.

Prospero believes Caliban to be an aspect of himself; if he can just get Caliban to acknowledge Prospero’s superiority, to love him, Prospero will succeed. Césaire’s text undercuts the validity of these ideas by directly rejecting the tendency of the white self to absorb the black other as shadow-self. When Prospero argues that Caliban has tried to rape Miranda, Caliban denies it, arguing that Prospero is passing his own desires onto

Caliban, unraveling the idea that the self and other are one and the same. The final scene shows an aged and weary Prospero, calling weakly to Caliban and saying “Caliban, nous ne sommes plus que deux sur cette île, plus que toi et moi. Toi et moi! Toi-Moi! Moi-Toi!” (92), while Caliban, still passionate and defiant, celebrates his freedom in the distance. Césaire’s text represents a clean break from the trend that shows Caliban as a shadow-self or an aspect of the self, and instead concentrates on giving a strong, clear voice to the other.

As Fanon does in *Black Skin. White Masks*, Césaire also works to unravel the inferiority and servitude that texts such as *The Colonizer and the Colonized* ascribe to the colonized man. Césaire begins by reframing the language of servitude in Shakespeare’s text. Despite the proud assertions of Shakespeare’s Caliban that “this island’s mine,” (I.ii. 334), he is quick to offer the island to Stephano in their first encounter. Like many of the natives in the New World,<sup>13</sup> Caliban immediately offers his knowledge of the land to his new “masters,” forgetting that it has proved dangerous to do so to Prospero. After once showing Prospero “all the qualities o’th’isle” (I.ii:339), Caliban now promises to show Stephano “every fertile inch o’th’island” (II.i:148). His grand attempt to reclaim his island is not an act of overthrowing Prospero to establish his own rule; it is a voluntary exchange of one master for another. As he tries to convince Stephano to kill Prospero and rule in his place, Caliban pleads “I’ll show thee the best springs; I’ll pluck thee berries; I’ll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough” (II.ii:160-1). His lines are an unmistakable echo of Caliban’s servitude to Prospero, especially his earlier efforts carrying wood and finding “fresh springs” (I.ii:340) for him.

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<sup>13</sup> See the texts of Léry and Rountree for descriptions of the way that the Tupinamba and Powhatan welcomed colonists.

The servitude demonstrated by Caliban in his first encounter with Stephano and Trinculo can be interpreted as a natural tendency towards subordination—a voluntary slavery that Caliban enters as a way of escaping the ‘tyranny’ of Prospero’s rule. To ingratiate himself to his new king, Stephano, Caliban deliberately humbles himself, losing the pride and rage against authority that he demonstrates when he addresses Prospero. In contrast to the curses that he heaped upon Prospero, Caliban reveals nothing but subservience towards Stephano, exclaiming “I will kiss thy foot; I prithee, be my god” (II:ii:149). This groveling new Caliban plays an important role in establishing Caliban as the prototype for the colonized man Octave Mannoni’s *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*. Mannoni theorizes that the dependence of a slave on a master is “itself reassuring,” because anyone “who has a protector he can count on need fear no danger” (43). When Caliban drunkenly sings “Freedom, high-day! High-day, freedom! Freedom,” his idea of freedom is not autonomy, but the idea that “Caliban has a new master” (II:ii:184-6). These interactions pose some of the fundamental questions about the psychology of servitude, helping to establish an influential chain of criticism linking the play to the psychology of the colonized native.

For Caliban to resonate as the play’s center and hero, Césaire must take away the authority and control that Prospero exercises in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, writing against readers and critics who see Prospero as the play’s benevolent hero. As Marjorie Garber explains in *Shakespeare After All*, “Prospero has often been seen as a figure for the artist as creator—as Shakespeare’s stand-in, so to speak, or Shakespeare’s self-conception, an artist figure unifying the world around him by his ‘most potent art’” (852-3). To read Prospero’s powers of creation and the way that he abjures his “rough magic” as a

metaphor for Shakespeare's role as playwright is to make Prospero writer and director as well as character. While generations of critics have allowed Prospero to be seen as both author and character, interchangeable with Shakespeare himself, Césaire deliberately removes the character from his position as author. In re-creating *The Tempest* as an extended allegory for colonialism, Césaire must do more than establish Caliban as hero; he must de-center Prospero—transforming him from a character who represents “all mankind...man-the-artist or man the scholar” (Garber, 852) to a character who stands for the very worst of colonialism.

In a prologue directed by a master of ceremonies, the characters are invited to choose their own parts. Although the master of ceremonies appears only briefly to pass out masks and articulate the role chosen by each actor, the onstage presence of a “director” who breaks the fourth wall (as Shakespeare's Prospero does in his epilogue) establishes that Prospero no longer functions as “director” in Césaire's play. By creating a new character whose sole purpose is to direct the actors, Césaire immediately presents Prospero as just another masked player—not some omniscient puppeteer who directs the play as he acts in it and addresses the audience in an epilogue. With this new addition, Prospero's power is undermined. Undercutting Prospero's role as author/director not only leaves room for Caliban to emerge as the hero of the play, but it also adds an element of unpredictability to the play. In Shakespeare's *Tempest*, each moment is planned and executed by Prospero; Césaire's *Tempest* uses the first scene of the play to break away from both Prospero and Shakespeare. There are no perfectly executed plans in Césaire's version of the play, and as the framework of Shakespeare's plot unravels, so does Prospero's ‘authority.’

With the de-centering of Prospero and the resulting lack of genuine authority, Césaire also dismantles the theme of forgiveness that critics have found in *The Tempest*. The planned marriage and reconciliation in Shakespeare's *Tempest* tie into the play's "projection of idealisms—neoplatonism, providentialism, benevolent rule, the redemptive power of forgiveness," (Annabel Patterson, qtd in Rozett 133). If Shakespeare's Prospero is both competent and careful in his efforts to both revenge and pardon, Césaire's play presents Prospero as petty, disorganized, and paranoid. In his first scene, he confides to Miranda that he believes that "ces sacripants" on the boat are coming to take "les terres pressenties par mon génie" (Césaire 22). With these lines, Césaire changes Prospero's motivation from reconciliation to revenge and his nature from generous towards his fellow Europeans to strangely possessive. Césaire's Prospero's actions are motivated by fear, hatred, and the desire to control others, but never by genuine forgiveness. He also never takes responsibility for his own actions, which Césaire highlights by portraying Prospero's actions as hypocritical rather than heroic. This is fitting, because *Une Tempête* is not about forgiveness—it is about taking back control through active rebellion.

Only after Prospero begins to suspect that Caliban might take action to win back his island does Prospero abruptly rethink his plan for vengeance. Prospero's grand scheme, which is presented as thorough and well planned in Shakespeare, becomes a panicked improvisation in *Une Tempête*. His motivation for arranging Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage is not arranging for his daughter's happiness, but for his own safety. As he arranges this last-minute effort, Césaire's Prospero reassures himself that "quant à Caliban q'importe ce que peut machiner contre moi ce scélérat. Toute la noblesse d'Italie, Naples et Milan désormais confondues, me fera rempart de son corps" (Césaire 29). This



sets Césaire's Prospero up as weaker than the Prospero of Shakespeare, and indicates that, whereas Prospero's power was unlimited in Shakespeare, the power of Césaire's Prospero is the power of a failed colonizer who is rapidly losing control of his colony.

Césaire further illustrates Prospero's problematic role as a colonizer by drastically altering the masque scene that celebrates the engagement of the young lovers. Within Shakespeare's text, the spectacle is both a dazzling display of Prospero's absolute power and a reflection of the nature of Prospero's thoughts. As Prospero concentrates on the successful match of Ferdinand and Miranda, the masque remains light and beautiful. When he remembers Caliban's revolt, however, the masque darkens and Prospero chooses to end the entertainment so that he can deal with the "foul conspiracy/ Of that beast Caliban and his confederates/ against my life" (IV.i.139-41). The spectacle remains under Prospero's control throughout the scene and, despite Prospero's distraction, it amazes Ferdinand so much that he asks Prospero to "let me live here ever;/ So rare a wond'ring father and a wise/ Makes this place Paradise" (IV.i.122-4).

Césaire plays with the Euro-centricity of the masque of Roman Gods by introducing the Yoruba trickster god, Eshu. When Prospero puzzles over Eshu's appearance, Eshu responds that "personne ne m'a invité" (69) (no one invited me [48]), but he remains and sings in a deliberate mocking of the occasion and Prospero's power. Laurence Porter argues that this "obscene song" is a reference to the "realistic sexual dimension in marriage" (376) and is a reference to Ferdinand and Miranda. This is a valid point, particularly since Césaire has rewritten Prospero's decision about their engagement as hasty and self-serving. But Eshu's presence in Prospero's carefully crafted world can also imply a deeper meaning. His uninvited interruption is an indication that Prospero's

hold on his small colony is slipping. Like colonists who are forced to realize that they cannot properly control a population of indigenous peoples and still keep their European sense of order intact, Prospero struggles with the extent of his colonial involvement. In many ways, Eshu is Caliban, who stands up to Prospero and refuses to follow his lie.

Césaire further de-centers Prospero by reframing the Shakespearean discourse on language. The colonial instinct to “civilize” and shape the other in the image of the colonizer is particularly evident in the way that Shakespeare’s Prospero and Caliban debate language. Caliban’s bitter condemnations of Prospero and Miranda for teaching him language are arguably the most influential passages used by theorists to tie the *Tempest* to colonization and colonial authority. That Caliban learned to speak from Prospero and Miranda is never disputed; Caliban himself reverences the way that Prospero taught him “to name the bigger light and how the less” (I.ii.338). Miranda’s<sup>14</sup> harsh admonition that by giving Caliban language they have given his thoughts meaning and purpose has proved problematic to postcolonial critics who were paying “new attention to language as a tool of domination and as a means of constructing identity” (Loomba and Orkin 3):

I pitied thee,  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour  
One thing or another: when thou didst not, savage,  
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like  
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes  
With words that made them known (I:ii:355-61)

Caliban’s response is powerful, painful, and unprecedented: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t is, I know how to curse!” (I:ii: 365). Inspiring books such as Stephen Greenblatt’s *Learning to Curse* and cited by renowned authors such as Homi Bhabba,

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<sup>14</sup> This passage is sometimes given by editors to Prospero.

Aimé Césaire, and Ngugi Wa'thiongo, Caliban's outcry resonates with any civilization forced to speak the language of their conquerors rather than their own language.

Greenblatt maintains that "Europeans believed their 'lettered culture' gave them a kind of license to ignore the humanity of Indians and others of a supposedly 'unlettered culture'" (C11). When Montaigne describes the innocent nature of the New World in "Of Coaches," he maintains that it is "so new and infantile, that he is not yet to learn his A.B.C." (171). He presents writing as an advantage which has been denied them, which they might seek, despite the corrupting influence that civilization might bring. While Shakespeare, too, emphasizes the importance of language and the power that it has by making Prospero's books the source of his magic, Caliban's attitude towards language does not mirror that of Montaigne's innocent and noble savages. Prospero, far from trying to keep language from Caliban, teaches him freely, striving to 'improve' him through language. Where Montaigne paints a picture of an innocent native who learns eagerly, Caliban longs to "burn [Prospero's] books" (III:ii:89). He rejects the implication that language contains anything of value to him, and clings to his assertion that his only profit from this education is discovering "how to curse!" (I:ii:365). The concept of using the language of the colonizer to curse and attack colonization is one of the mainstays of postcolonial thought, and it is particularly relevant to Césaire's interpretation of *The Tempest*.

Where Shakespeare's Prospero describes gabbling, an inhuman language, with Prospero and Miranda endowing Caliban with the light of human language, Césaire instead shows Caliban's original language to be a clear language in its own right. Césaire's Caliban greets Prospero by using the Swahili word 'Uhuru,' meaning freedom.

Césaire's Prospero projects the colonial idea that Caliban is "un barbare! Une bête brute que j'ai éduquée, formée, que j'ai tirée de l'animalité qui l'engange encore de toute part!" (25). Caliban's response is a bitter condemnation of Prospero's claim to have civilized his animal nature: "tu ne m'as rien appris du tout" (25). Where Shakespeare's Caliban acknowledges that Prospero has given him language, Césaire's Caliban mocks Prospero for teaching him "ton langage pour comprendre tes orderes" and reminds Prospero that he had language before Prospero arrived on the island and stripped him of it. He then denies Prospero the right to call him Caliban, saying:

Appelle-moi X. Ça vaudra mieux. Comme qui dirait l'homme sans nom.  
Plus exactement, l'homme don't on a volé le nom. Tu parles d'histoire.  
Eh bien ça, c'est de histoire, et fameuse! Chaque fois que tu m'appelleras,  
ça me rappellera le fait fundamental, que tu m'as tout volé et jusqu'à mon  
identité! Uhuru! (28).

In a postcolonial battle cry, Caliban condemns Prospero not for teaching him, but for denying Caliban's self and the knowledge he had before Prospero. The language that Prospero insists on is not about educating Caliban—it is about taking away his identity. Caliban even rejects the names 'Caliban' or 'Cannibal,' preferring (like another famous revolutionary) to use the name 'X.'

*Une Tempête* also takes an ecocritical approach to the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, with Prospero's island taking on greater significance as a symbol for the earth itself. Césaire directly connects the postcolonial and environmental agendas by presenting Caliban, his primary example of the colonized, as a representation of the natural environment of the island. Prospero refers to Caliban as "thou earth, thou!" which some critics interpret as an insult—a contrast to the airy qualities of Ariel (I.ii.316). In Césaire's play, Caliban is the representative for the earth, while Prospero is

“l’anti-Nature” (Césaire 74). At the first encounter between Prospero and Caliban in the play, Caliban accuses Prospero of believing that “la terre est chose morte...C’est tellement plus commode! Morte, alors on la piétine, on la souille, on la foule d’un pied vainqueur! Moi, je la respecte...” (25-6). This reflects the knowledge that Shakespeare’s Caliban has of “every fertile inch o’th’island” (II.ii.136) and firmly establishes Caliban’s connection with nature. Césaire’s Caliban, like the Shakespearean version, has an extensive knowledge of the island, which he now regrets sharing with Prospero upon his arrival. In Césaire’s text, both Caliban and Sycorax are described as connected to the earth, and when Prospero taunts Caliban with the memory of his mother’s death, Caliban responds that Sycorax is alive in the earth around him, saying:

Sycorax ma mère!  
Serpent! Plui! Eclairs!  
Et je te retrouve partout...  
Dans la nuit, la toute-voyante  
aveugle,  
La toute-flaireuse sans naseaux! (Césaire 26)

Césaire presents Caliban as a hero not only for his resistance and rebellion against Prospero’s colonization, but for his rejection of Prospero’s science in favor of a deep respect for the earth and his role as defender of nature.

While Césaire’s Caliban is the living embodiment of nature itself, his Prospero is entirely removed from nature, a destructive force that sees the earth as something that can be owned, controlled, or killed. For him, Caliban, Ariel, and the island itself are all resources that he can use up in his effort to get revenge on his brother and the Italians who have rejected him. Where the other shipwrecked colonizers are merely greedy, willing to take what they can from the island and the island’s inhabitants in order to

improve their own positions, Césaire's Prospero is actively destructive, hurting the environment in addition to depleting it. While Shakespeare's Prospero used his rough magic to work with Ariel and nature itself, Césaire replaces the "magic" of Shakespeare's Prospero with a thorough knowledge of the science of war and weapon-making. After describing the tear gas in Prospero's "arsenal anti-émeutes," Caliban mentions "il a un tas de trucs comme ça; pour assouvir, pour aveugler, pour faire éternuer, pour faire pleurer..." (Césaire 77). Césaire presents Prospero as a tyrant who is willing to make Ariel, Caliban, and the island itself suffer in order to establish his control. Prospero's reign over the island is not the profitable harvest that Gonzalo envisions; it is a destructive effort to conquer the island and its inhabitants.

In Césaire's text, the battle of wills between Prospero and Caliban is as focused on the differences in their environmental ideologies as it is on the differences in their political ideologies. By merging the postcolonial and the environmentalist agendas in the character of Caliban, Césaire gives Caliban's rebellion more significance than a simple fight for freedom. When Césaire's Caliban challenges Prospero, he is fighting not only for his own rights, but for the rights of the earth itself. When Césaire's Caliban finds his path to Prospero's habitation blocked by snakes, scorpions, and porcupines, Caliban encourages the animals to join him in fighting Prospero by stating:

Qu'un animal, si je puis dire, naturel, s'en prenne à moi le jour où je pars à l'assaut de Prospero, plus souvent! Prospero, c'est l'anti-Nature!  
Moi je dis: À bas l'anti-Nature! (Césaire 74-5)

Caliban's rebellion against Prospero is a rebellion against both political oppression and environmental destruction, but it fails when Caliban is unwilling to kill the unarmed Prospero. In the end, it seems that Caliban is more under Prospero's control than ever,

when Prospero chooses to remain on the island in an effort to make Caliban conform to Prospero's colonialist ideals. As the rest of the Europeans depart, Prospero describes Caliban as "la sarigue qui la tire de la nuit se hisse au cordage de sa propre queue!" In the final scene, however, nature itself responds to Prospero's efforts to control and restrict it by sending its own rebellion of "sarigues" to take back control of the island. An old and weary Prospero appears and weakly states:

C'est drôle, depuis quelque temps, nous sommes ici envahis par des sarigues. Y en a partout...Des pécaris, des cochons sauvages, toute cette sale nature! Mais des sarigues, surtout...Oh, ces yeux! Et sur la face, ce rictus ignoble! On jurerait que la jungle veut investir la grotte. Mais je me défendrai...Je ne laisserai pas périr mon œuvre...(92)

In this final scene, Césaire presents Prospero as a defeated colonizer who has never been able to truly conquer Caliban or the island, once again drawing parallels between the colonized subject and the colonized territory. The postcolonial and the environmentalist agendas both reach their desired conclusion in Césaire's text with the triumph of the oppressed and the defeat of the oppressor.

While the key roles of "colonizer and colonized" in *Une Tempête* are played by Prospero and Caliban, Césaire also provides a postcolonial revision of Shakespeare's Gonzalo—who is himself a revision of Montaigne's imaginings of the New World. When Shakespeare's Gonzalo first arrives on the island, he imagines living there in his own utopia, complete with noble savages, abundant food, and a life without work, governing the inhabitants as he wished. His description of his perfect society is not only reminiscent of Montaigne's "Of the Caniballes," translated into English in 1603 by John Florio—it lifts words and phrases directly from Florio's translation. Where Florio's Montaigne states that the cannibals "hath no kinde of trafficke, no knowledge of letters...no name of

magistrate,” Gonzalo dictates that “no kind of traffic would I admit; no name of magistrate; letters should not be known” (I.ii.334). Just as Gonzalo would outlaw “treason” and “felony,” Montaigne reports that “the very words that impart lying, falsehood, treason, dissimulations, covetousness, envie, detraction, and pardon were never heard amongst them” (Montaigne). Like Gonzalo, Montaigne compares the noble savages of his nation to “all the pictures wherewith licentious Poesie hath proudly imbellished the golden age” (Montaigne). By stating that his subjects should have no “riches, poverty, and use of service, none, contract, succession, bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none,” Gonzalo echoes Montaigne’s assertion that the cannibals have “no use of service, of riches or of povertie, no contract, no successions, no partitions.” Both Gonzalo and Montaigne remove their noble savages from the confines of rigid laws; they live in a land where they can exist freely without the complications of law. Shakespeare, however, includes only the most excessive and idealistic descriptions from the essay, presenting Gonzalo’s utopian dreams as unrealistic and leaving him open to the scorn of his companions.

By exaggerating Montaigne’s statements and taking them out of context, Shakespeare’s *Tempest* creates a creative dissonance with “Of the Caniballes” that is reminiscent of the way that Shakespeare’s own texts are reworked. Even as the play replicates Montaigne’s words through the character of Gonzalo, these words are continuously undercut by Antonio and Sebastian. His vision of a perfect commonwealth is punctuated by puns and jibes at his expense, giving the audience a chance to join in the mockery of Gonzalo’s vision rather than embracing it. Before he begins his description of the ideal plantation, Antonio and Sebastian suggest that he would use it to plant “nettle-



seed or docks or mallows” (II:1:140). When Gonzalo is most captivated by the image of ruling “with such perfection...t’excel the Golden Age,” they challenge the image with sarcastic exclamations of “Save his Majesty!” and “Long live Gonzalo!” (II:1:164-5). When Gonzalo’s Montaigne-laden conclusion claims that the island over which Gonzalo rules would accept “no name of magistrate,” Antonio and Sebastian mock him by remarking “and yet he would be king on’t!” (II.i.144, 8). For every point that Gonzalo makes, the two usurpers find a counterpoint. By punctuating Gonzalo’s idealistic visions with cutting insults, Shakespeare destabilizes the single point of view that dominates Montaigne’s essays. Juxtaposing idealism and skepticism, *The Tempest* calls attention to the appeal of an idealized “new world” while distancing Gonzalo’s ideas from those of the audience.

Césaire brings a similar critical distance to his appropriation of Gonzalo’s speech. Where Shakespeare’s Gonzalo is content to spin dreams that are neither possible nor profitable, Césaire’s Gonzalo is immediately practical. Within moments of arriving on the island, he states that the island, “sous une sage direction, sera plus riche que l’Égypte avec son Nil” (39). This new Gonzalo provides the perfect dramatization of Albert Memmi’s description of “a naïve person who lands just by chance” (4) in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. He is a colonizer who arrives upon the island with no preconceived plans to profit from its resources, but it does not “take him long to discover the advantages of his new situation” (4). Césaire’s Gonzalo pairs an idealistic vision of the island’s natives as “bons sauvages, libres, sans complexes ni complications” with the plans to use them as a work force to strip the island of its natural resources. He imagines inviting weary Europeans to come to the island to enjoy the savage culture of such

natives, calling it a “réservoir d’éternelle jeunesse où nous viendrions périodiquement rafraîchir nos âmes vieilles et citadines” (41). His descriptions of the natives are similar to the way that Montaigne creates a distinct division between the “naked, simply pure” and “infantine” savages and the worldly and corrupt European who cheats and murders them in “Of Coaches.” Unlike both Montaigne and Shakespeare’s Gonzalo, however, Césaire’s Gonzalo embraces his own role as a colonizer who will willingly exploit the natives for his own gain.

Césaire also adjusts the reactions of Gonzalo’s companions to fit with the anti-colonial theme. Antonio and Sebastian quickly see the potential in Gonzalo’s vision and question him with open curiosity, abandoning the sarcasm of their first brief remarks almost immediately. Césaire’s Antonio and Sebastian do not interject with the same gibes and taunts that Shakespeare’s characters offer. Instead, all three men eagerly exchange ideas about profiting from the island. The role of irreverent critic, filled in Shakespeare’s text by Antonio and Sebastian, is curiously absent in Césaire’s play, as though Césaire felt that the audience members themselves could supply the criticism of the colonial dream.

As a politician and activist, Césaire coined the term “negritude” to describe the popular movement “reclaiming of the derogatory ‘negre’ by...francophone blacks in the Caribbean” (Davis, 35). Like Shakespeare’s Caliban, Césaire uses the words of the conqueror—words meant to constrain—as a means of breaking free. Having ‘learned to curse’ in the language of Prospero, Césaire re-appropriates Shakespeare’s Caliban as he does the word ‘negre.’ As a critical reading of both Shakespeare’s play and colonialism

itself, *Une Tempête* is about taking things back, reclaiming them and reworking the most negative labels of the colonizer into expressions of empowerment.

### SECTION III: CHAPTER II

#### RACE AND REBELLION IN POSTCOLONIAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

##### OTRA TEMPESTAD BY RAQUEL CARRIÓ

Raquel Carrió's *Otra Tempestad* (1998) examines the complexities of colonization by breaking away from the duality that characterizes earlier postcolonial texts such as Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969). Rather than emphasizing the binaries of wrong/right, colonizer/colonized, Prospero/Caliban, Carrió re-routes the postcolonial with a more inclusive approach. Combining African myth and Shakespearean drama with a Caribbean setting, Carrió explores the clashing and blending of the Old and New Worlds. Unlike Césaire, Carrió does not shape these interactions as an attack on colonialism or an accusation against European culture. On the contrary, she argues that "in the crisscrossing of references, echoes, and European and African images, there are no 'winners' and 'losers' but rather that interchange of rituals and actions which characterizes that cultural syncretism of Latin America and the Caribbean" (Carrió qtd in Hulme 158). *Otra Tempestad* is a textual appropriation about cultural appropriation. Carrió's emphasis on "cultural syncretism" establishes her play as a hybrid text that glorifies rather than condemns the mixing and merging of racial and national identities.

Raquel Carrió's *Otra Tempestad* complicates the dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized by presenting a chaotic mix of characters who play a variety of roles in

the island colony. Where Césaire's *Une Tempête* keeps nearly the entire cast of Shakespeare's *Tempest* and follows the general structure of Shakespeare's plot, Carrió's text is a looser adaptation in which Prospero and Miranda end up shipwrecked on the island with a host of characters from other Shakespearean plays, including Othello, Shylock, Macbeth, and Hamlet. Caliban's mother Sycorax (alive and well) is recast as Yoruban mother-goddess, and Caliban has three sisters: Eleggua, Oya, and Oshun. As Yoruban nature goddesses, Sycorax and her daughters are responsible for the tempest that brings the ship full of Shakespearean characters to the island. *Otra Tempestad* crashes the two worlds together in a way that is, as Carrió describes it, the "properly voracious, irreverent, transgressive, parodic, and festive way for the 'conquered' to appropriate myths and to model them (represent them) as their own" (Carrió qtd in Hulme 160).

The shipwrecked Shakespearean characters re-imagine the island in their own image. Upon their arrival, Othello wonders if they have landed in Africa, while Shylock believes they have found the Promised Land, then later thinks they have found the garden of Eden. The Yoruban goddesses function as blank slates upon which the Shakespearean castaways inadvertently re-write their own stories. But Eleggua, Oshun, and Oya also take an active role in enticing and tormenting the Shakespearean characters, bringing them into power only to see them fail. Othello sees Oshun as Desdemona. Hamlet sees Oshun as Ophelia and Oya as Gertrude. Shylock uses Eleggua to tell the story of his youth, when he was Romeo. Prospero and Macbeth draw on the powers of Eleggua and Oya to create their ideal societies on the island. When he sees Eleggua, Carrió's Prospero immediately claims her as his Ariel, enlisting her help in creating his Utopian Republic. As Eleggua's master, Prospero uses her powers to experiment and control the island and

its inhabitants—Shakespearean and Yoruban. It is only when his destructive oppression leads to the death of Miranda that he once again abjures his rough magic. Oya takes on the role of Lady Macbeth, and the two of them take over the island in a bloody reign of destruction that ends in Macbeth's death. In the final scene, entitled 'Caliban Rex,' Caliban takes the island kingdom that is his birthright, but his ascension is haunted rather than triumphant.

*Otra Tempestad* was performed by Teatro Buendia in Shakespeare's Globe to packed houses during its initial tour, but the play was unsuccessful with London theater critics. While the actors were praised for their exuberance and athleticism, the production itself was dismissed as "a Cuban mishmash" (Curtis, 1998) and "rough magic, with 'rough' being the operative word" (Taylor, 1998). The majority of reviewers writing about the play expressed only confusion at the performance. The *Evening Standard's* Nick Curtis opens his review by declaring that after reading the synopsis of the play "three times now...I still don't know what on earth it's about" (Curtis, 1998). Ian Shuttleworth similarly comments "without the programme's scene-by-scene synopsis, I would have had little or no idea what was going on from moment to moment; even with it, there is no indication of *why*" (Shuttleworth, 1998). Simultaneously lamenting the density of the plot and the lack of plot, most of the reviews mention a difficulty in following the action that goes beyond the comprehension issues that arise from reviewing a play in Spanish without supertitles.

The integration of the Yoruban goddesses and the characters from other Shakespeare plays proved particularly perplexing for reviewers. Curtis refers to the play as a departure from "the usual grind where productions of *The Tempest* make sense and

Shakespearean protagonists stick to their own plays” (Curtis, 1998), while Paul Taylor wryly comments that “if Richard III had limped [onstage] in lascivious pursuit of a Yoruban spirit that had disguised itself as Juliet’s Nurse, I would not have turned a hair” (Taylor, 1998). Unable to discern a rhyme or reason to the confusing blend of characters and plot points, Ian Shuttleworth states “this particular gallimaufry seems to have been put together for its own sake. It is eye-catching...but to no apparent end” (Shuttleworth, 1998). The question of “why?” and “to what end?” surface frequently in the reviews. The critics were looking for a clear agenda and a coherent structure in the play (something perhaps more akin to Césaire’s *Une Tempête*), and they didn’t find it.

The one plot point that did register for theater critics in the London performance comes when a bearded Prospero attempts to establish a utopian society on the island. Quick to make the connection with Castro, critics peppered their reviews with comments such as “that beard of Prospero’s is quite Fidelista” (Shuttleworth, 1998) and “we are clearly being given political theatre that Castro’s regime would find it painful to bless” (Kingston, 1998). Even this recognizable connection is criticized for being difficult to follow; Paul Taylor argues that “what the show is trying to say became steadily less clear as the evening wore on. Any parallels between Cuba and Prospero’s Island (in respect of bearded dictators coming to the end of their rule) are not highlighted” (Taylor, 1998). While critics such as Taylor and Shuttleworth argue both that the island is meant to represent Cuba, but that the allegory is ineffective, I believe that the allegory is not meant to be so straightforward. Prospero’s republic lasts only a few scenes, and he is only one of several characters who have a chance to rule the island. They each fail at constructing their ideal island because the history of colonization is littered with failed utopias. Carrió

does not simply use Shakespeare's Prospero as a way to critique Castro in particular. By reworking *The Tempest*, a master narrative of colonialism and utopian studies, Carrió challenges the very concept of constructing an ideal society. Carrió's island is not just Cuba—it is any brave new world upon which colonizers can “write” their utopian vision. She builds upon the image of the island that already dominates Shakespeare's *Tempest* to critique not only the practice of colonization, but the theory behind it.

The word “Isla” reverberates throughout the play; it is the final word of both the first scene and the last scene (where the word is one of many echoing “sonidos de la isla” that bring the play to a close). Each scene contains at least one character's vision for the island: Prospero's republic, Shylock's dreams of the Promised Land, Macbeth's dictatorship, even Caliban's inherited kingdom. While there are certainly references to Cuba, Carrió's reinterpretation of *The Tempest* speaks to the idea of “the island” as a canvas for conquerors and dreamers. In a discussion of island imagery in colonial and postcolonial literature, Robert Fraser explains that the island symbolism “is only fully meaningful when combined with the sea, viewed as an element of enclosure and exploitation, erosion and possibility. Taken together, the two symbolisms compose an image of a society of migrants deriving their identities from elsewhere and obliged, in the confined area of an island, to work out a common destiny, a nationhood” (Fraser 153). Carrió's revision of Prospero's island is a fantastical exploration of this sort of nation-building enterprise. Shakespearean characters bring complex character histories to their new world, which they impose on the Yoruban goddesses and the island itself. Through the dreamy interactions between the male Shakespearean characters and the female orishas, in which the fantasies and histories of the men are played out in a new setting



through the female characters, Carrió explores the gendering of conquered land. Islands, and women, are treated as fertile ground that can be claimed by men. In Carrió's play, men re-write islands and women as expressions of their own desires. Prospero's island becomes everyone's island—a site for making individual utopias.

Robert Fraser maintains that “the island is the blank and confined space on which the form of the nation is inscribed” (Fraser 154). The Shakespearean colonizers of Carrió's *Otra Tempestad* see their island as exactly this sort of blank slate. When Prospero announces “a nuestro Viejo Mundo ha llegado un rumor. Existen nuevos continentes!” (106), each character seems eager to leave their “Old World” behind and build new lives on their “Isla.” Carrió's text undercuts this fantasy by making it clear that there are no blank slates in the story—the colonizers, the island, and its inhabitants (even the newborn Caliban) all come with their own contexts and complications. The director of *Otra Tempestad*, Flora Lauten, explains that the characters “are eager to go to this new world and leave their pasts behind, but everything they left keeps coming again full circle. These things are all aspects of the human soul, and you cannot escape them” (qtd in Palmer 1998). Instead of a blank slate, the island becomes a kind of literary Purgatory where the characters can explore their own complicity in their tragic fates. The Shakespearean castaways are haunted by the specters of their previous plotlines as they interact with Sycorax and her daughters on the enchanted island. Although Carrió removes these Shakespearean characters from the settings and the plots of their plays, they are each driven to return to reenact their earlier fate and come to terms with their tragic leanings.

However, as Flora Lauten explains, “it’s very difficult to construct a Utopia” (qtd in Palmer 1998). The new worlds constructed by the Shakespearean characters and their Yoruban counterparts inevitably fail. Carrió builds on the utopian imagery in Shakespeare’s text, but her text subverts the visions of Isla as they are glorified. Carrió, like Césaire, incorporates the words of Shakespeare’s Gonzalo and his dreams of establishing a plantation on the island and living as king upon it. Carrió, however, transforms the statement entirely by making Macbeth the speaker; his first words after his arrival on the island are “¡Si yo fuera rey de esta plantación!” (111). While Shakespeare’s Gonzalo imagines a utopian settlement of innocence and idleness, Macbeth’s vision is darker and more destructive, with plans of conquering the island and taking slaves. When Oya, the goddess of wind and death, makes his dreams a reality in the penultimate scene of the play, the result is a chaotic reign of blood and violence that ends in Macbeth’s own death. Carrió’s use of Gonzalo’s speech is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s use of Montaigne—both texts introduce the fantasy of utopia only to undercut it. By leading her characters from utopian dreams to death and ruin, Carrió echoes Chinua Achebe’s appropriation of Yeats—Things fall apart. The center cannot hold.

Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin argue that by studying Shakespeare, colonized and oppressed populations become “hybrid”<sup>15</sup> subjects, leading to new forms of discourse:

Many post-colonial critics regard the hybridity of colonial and post-colonial subjects as a potentially radical state, one that enables such subjects to elude, or even subvert the binaries, oppositions, and rigid demarcations imposed by colonial discourses (7).

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<sup>15</sup> As I explained in the introduction to this section of the dissertation, Loomba and Orkin define “hybrid” as “the range of psychological as well as physiological mixings generated by colonial encounters” (7).

Carrió's text subverts the binaries of anti-colonial readings of Shakespeare like Césaire's in favor of portraying a hybrid culture. In the case of Carrió, however, the "radical state includes not only the colonized subjects, but the colonizers themselves. When asked to define the postcolonial message of her play, Carrió responds:

it is no longer a matter of negating the language of the conqueror, but rather of investigating how, from the crossing of cultures and ethnicities comes *another culture*, a third language which not that of the victor nor that of the defeated but a product of their syncretism (Carrió qtd in Hulme and Sherman 159).

Each of the attempts by the colonizers to ascribe meaning onto the island fails because the colonizers are not writing the story of the island—they are a part of the story.

The way that Carrió recasts Sycorax as a Yoruban mother-goddess, with three orishas as her daughters also reflects a mestizo mindset. Santería (Caribbean) and Candomble (Brazil) incorporate elements of Yoruban mythology, merging them with Catholicism to create syncretic religions. While Césaire incorporates Eshu into Prospero's masque scene to demonstrate strife and difference, the orishas in *Otra Tempestad* are an example of the blending of cultures. According to *The Encyclopedia of African and African American Religions*:

Santeria is but one of a series of related Yoruba-based religions that exist in the Caribbean, in Central and South America, and, now, in the United States...all of them are places where mixtures of pre-existing religions have given rise to new religious forms that are both hybrid and distinctive (Glazier 285).

The figures of the Yoruban goddesses not only represent hybridity—their roles in the play facilitate hybridity and the ways that nations, identities, and hierarchies can be reordered. Making the Yoruban deities responsible for the play's tempest instead of Prospero has the effect of de-centering Prospero, as it does in Césaire. But Carrió's text

offers no single power dynamic to replace it. Sycorax begins the play in control of the island, but the arrival of the colonizers brings chaos. First Prospero and Eleggua assume power, then Macbeth and Oya, and finally Caliban. The changing identity of the island, like the changing identities of the Yoruban goddesses, reflects the fluid hybridity found in all colonized lands.

While Carrió's play is not staunchly anti-colonial, images of colonization haunt the text. In Prospero's first meeting with Ariel, he flourishes a handheld mirror, dangling it before Ariel and Caliban. When Ariel becomes entranced by the mirror, exclaiming "¡Grandes son tus poderes!" the scene is eerily reminiscent of early modern encounters between European colonizers and natives of the New World. In "Of Coaches," Montaigne describes natives "who for the wonder of a glistening looking-glasse or of a plaine knife, would have changed or given inestimable riches in Gold, Precious Stones and Pearles" (173). John Smith described the "savages" of Virginia as "generally covetous of copper, beads, and such like trash" in his *Map of Virginia*, and William Strachey echoed this belief in his *Historie of Travell Into Virginia Britania*. Jean de Léry, in particular, makes a point of illustrating the admiration that many of the natives he encounters exhibit in response to European clothing. In his brief encounter with the Margaia, Léry and his fellow travelers give them shirts (along with other commodities) in exchange for food and labor, and Léry emphasizes that the natives take care in keeping their new shirts clean, to the extent that they "preferent leurs chemises à leur peau" (Léry 151). To the natives, the beads and clothing offered by the colonists were valuable commodities, desirable for trade or personal status, and colonizers were able to use that to their advantage. Carrió's Eleggua becomes spellbound by a single mirror, agreeing to

become Prospero's Ariel. By the time that Prospero establishes his republic, Eleggua appears wearing strange new clothing and spouting propaganda: "¡Ha llegado la luz de los sabios! ¡Ha nacido la República!" (119-9). Instead of moving with the strange, bird-like dancing and enthusiastic acrobatics that characterize Eleggua's mannerisms when Prospero first meets her, Eleggua stands upright and nearly marches as the voice of the Republic. Through Eleggua, Carrió models the effect of European colonizers on the New World colonized.

Where Prospero's mirror leaves Eleggua captivated (or captive), Carrió's Caliban resists the allure immediately. Although Eleggua tries to hold him down for Prospero, who holds the mirror and commands "¡Criatura, mira!" Caliban squirms free (110). Here, Carrió's portrayal of Caliban seems in keeping with Shakespeare's portrayal in *The Tempest*, which provides an early modern alternative to the concept of the ignorant savage who is willing to trade anything for some shiny mirrors and pretty clothing. When Shakespeare's Caliban arrives at Prospero's home with the intent of murdering him to take over the island, Prospero lays out "glistening apparel" (IV:1:193) in an effort to distract Caliban and thereby prevent the crime. By using this "trumpery" as "stale to catch these thieves" (IV:1:186-7), Prospero states his opinion that Caliban will respond to the clothing eagerly, in a manner similar to that of the 'savages' from travel narratives, and forget his earlier plan. Far from reacting to these gifts with the admiring joy that L  ry describes, however, Caliban shuns the clothing, dismissing it as "trash" and cautioning Trinculo to "let it alone, thou fool" (IV:1:224). While Caliban is envious of Prospero's power and longs to steal his island back, he firmly rejects the European frippery that Prospero offers him as a worthless distraction, never forgetting his plan to murder

Prospero and burn his books. Instead, it is the European Stephano and Trinculo who fall for the trick, delighting in the contents of the clothes line and trying on their new wardrobe with all the enthusiasm of L  ry’s Tupinamba. Stephano and Trinculo are so engrossed in the new clothing that they abandon their earlier ambition to become kings in favor of the illusion of dressing like them, while Caliban avoids the temptation of the clothing. Likewise, Carri  ’s Caliban is able to escape Prospero’s control by turning away from the mirror, which puts him in the company of resistance movements in colonized territories.

The only male character to inhabit the island before the arrival of the European characters is Caliban, who functions as both a Shakespearean character and a brother to the orishas (a particularly hybrid character in a text that is already characterized by hybridity). The only female character to arrive on the island is Miranda. While the Shakespearean character/Yoruban orisha interaction is characterized by the standard binaries of male/female, colonizer/colonized, landowner/land, Carri   breaks away from these binaries in the relationship between Caliban and Miranda. Carri   presents neither a gendered relationship in which Caliban has power over Miranda, nor a colonial relationship in which Miranda has power over Caliban. Instead, they are counterparts, both functioning as innocents—blank slates who write upon each other. Their first encounter has no dialogue, but even their actions mimic each other:

*Se descubren. Toda la naturaleza de la isla: jubilo, exaltacion.  
La aproximacion es muy lenta. Se miran, se huelen, se tocan.  
Juegan juntos. Entran a la gruta (115).*

Shakespeare plays on Miranda’s name by giving Ferdinand the line “Admired Miranda! Indeed the top of admiration, worth what’s dearest to the world! (III.ii.37-8). Carri  

seems to draw similar inspiration from the similarity of Miranda's name to the Spanish words 'mira' (a command to look) and 'mirada' (a gaze). The first action they perform together is "*se miran*," and they stare at each other incessantly. While Shakespeare's Miranda shudders with horror at Shakespeare's Caliban and tells her father that he is "a villain, sir, I do not love to look on," Carrió's Miranda is entranced by Caliban and cannot stop looking at him (I:ii:312-3). The same Caliban who is unimpressed by Prospero's mirror and the command "mira" is captivated by Miranda (110). Miranda functions as the 'mirror' from the New World that captivates Caliban when Prospero's handheld mirror cannot. Just as Caliban and Miranda mirror each other, their relationship transforms and inverts the Ferdinand/Miranda relationship from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In Shakespeare's text, Miranda falls in love with exactly the man her father wants her to love because Prospero pretends to hate Ferdinand. In Carrió's version, Prospero tries to force Miranda into a politically advantageous marriage with Othello (which also serves as an ironic inversion of the Brabantio/Desdemona conflict in *Othello*). Miranda's love of Caliban is an act of rebellion that runs counter to her father's plans, referencing her Shakespearean storyline while simultaneously transforming it.

By reducing, reusing, and recycling Shakespearean plotlines rather than presenting a straightforward allegory, Carrió dispenses with almost all of Shakespeare's language and phrasing. As a play written entirely in Spanish, Carrió would have lost Shakespeare's precise language even if she had kept to the general plot of *The Tempest*. But the form and content of the Spanish lines spoken by Caliban, Prospero, and Miranda suggest a greater dissonance from Shakespeare's text than the lines of the same characters in Césaire's text, which was written entirely in French. As Richard Miller's

note on the translation of *Une Tempête* argues, “the transposition of [Césaire’s] play into English inevitably calls up...linguistic echoes of Shakespeare” (4). With Carrió’s fragmented plot and phrasing, those linguistic echoes are not as present in Carrió’s play. In a play in which so much linguistic difference exists with the source text, it is the brief moments of linguistic similarity that are perhaps the most striking. As Peter Hulme explains, the “Shakespearean lines have special resonance” (157). Through Carrió’s use of a few key lines from selected Shakespearean plays, the audience recognizes the moments when Carrió employs repetition with critical difference.

Hulme references Carrió’s appropriation of two lines from *The Tempest*—“I had peopled else the isle with Calibans” and “this island’s mine” (I.ii.353-4, 334). Carrió takes these lines by Caliban and gives them to Miranda and Prospero respectively, leaving Carrió’s Caliban as what Hulme describes as “a strangely silent figure” (157). While Carrió’s Caliban is a quieter figure than Shakespeare’s or Césaire’s, I do not see the re-appropriation of these lines as an attempt by Carrió to stifle or silence Caliban’s voice. They function instead as a way to break the dialogues of colonialism away from a strictly antagonistic relationship between colonizer and colonized. As Philip Osment depicts in his play *This Island’s Mine*, the attempted rape of Miranda by Caliban is one of the strongest arguments against seeing the figure of Caliban as heroic. The idea that Caliban can take the island back by taking possession of Miranda establishes the character of Miranda as a territory that one can lay claim to—something that can pass from one man to another, like the island. Caliban’s statement “leads straight to the gendered complexities of Caliban’s and Prospero’s respective claims to the island, for both men’s rights turn out to operate through women” (Seed 204). Through the interactions of the



Yoruban goddesses with the Shakespearean characters, Carrió has already established that women and islands can be seen as blank slates upon which identity can be written. Carrió's reinterpretation of the Miranda and Caliban relationship and her appropriation of Caliban's line complicate the gendering of the island. By exclaiming "¡Quiero poblar esta isla de calibanes!" as her father tries to arrange a different "matrimonio feliz" for her, Miranda lays claim to her own body—and by extension, the island (120).

"This island's mine" has been treated as a battle cry by postcolonial criticism of *The Tempest*, a challenge to the usurping colonizers by the landless colonized. In *Otra Tempestad* Carrió re-inscribes the words by taking them away from Caliban and giving them to Prospero when he is at the height of his destructive power. Carrió's Prospero uses these lines to assert the rights of a conqueror to dispose of the island and its inhabitants in any way that he wishes. For both Carrió, the island is its own entity, changing in response to the arrival of the colonizers as much as Caliban and the Yoruban Orishas do. Carrió merges her commentary on the postcolonial and the environmental to create performative ecocriticism. By aligning Caliban with the island and Prospero and with the exploitation of the natural world, Carrió's play seems to embrace the ideas put forth by Césaire—that the colonized represents goodness and nature, while the colonizers are linked with development, destruction, and death. But Carrió gives added complexity to the metaphor by blurring the boundaries between the actions of the colonizer and the colonized. Her Caliban resists Prospero throughout the play. But his actions are mirrored by those of Miranda, who seems to fall in love with both Caliban and the island itself. The dark, dystopian societies of Prospero and Macbeth and made possible by the actions of two of Caliban's sisters, Elegua and Oya. By pairing the characters across the divides of

colonizer and colonized and illustrating their impacts on the island as linked for better or worse, Carrió rejects the idea that only the colonized will protect the land and only the colonizers will destroy it. Instead, the colonizers and the colonized merge to create new societies that can choose to respect the island or destroy it. Where Césaire's text emphasizes the separation between the colonizer and the colonized, Carrió's text consistently returns to a blending of the cultures, reinforcing its identity as a *mestizo* text.

When Caliban takes his place as king of the island in the final scene, it is not portrayed as the triumph of the colonized over the colonizer and the natural over the unnatural, as it is in Césaire's play. Instead, Carrió's Caliban stands in the center of the stage listening to the echoes of the other characters:

¡Caliban! ¡Caliban! ¡Caliban!  
¡Llévanos a la Tierra que nosh an prometido!  
    *Sonidos de la isla.*<sup>16</sup>  
¡Será un paraíso!  
¡De pájaros exóticos!  
¡Isla!  
Caliban!  
¡Mi hermano será! (133)

These are the words of utopia—promised land, paradise, island. The final line is spoken by the actress who plays Elegua. Although she is no longer in character, her initial claim that “¡Quando Sycorax se muera mi hermano sera rey!” (109) is fulfilled in the final scene, as Caliban becomes “Caliban Rex” (132). Rather than presenting the new Caliban Rex as a hero who beat the colonizers, Carrió gives us a Caliban caught up in painful memory, with the ghosts of the fallen surrounding him. As Carrió explains, it is “an ending which warns us: ‘I have inherited a land razed by utopia and blood’” (Carrió qtd in Hulme 158). Surrounded by masks representing both the European colonizers and the

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<sup>16</sup> The island sounds mentioned here are described earlier as sounds of birds, rivers, and trees (115).

Yoruban goddesses who represent the colonized in this final image, Caliban ends the play as a character influenced by both worlds—a mestizo figure in a mestizo text.

In describing the political and social impact of *The Tempest* in Caribbean literature and thought, Robert Nixon argues that the play “came to serve as a Trojan Horse, whereby cultures barred from the citadel of ‘universal’ Western values could win entry and assail those global pretensions from within” (qtd in Fishburn 158). By writing *Otra Tempestad* as a celebration of globalization in a ‘brave New World,’ Raquel Carrió challenges the idea that postcolonial revision must also be an attack. If Césaire’s adaptation reminds us that Caliban has used Prospero’s language only for learning to curse, Carrió’s play invites the audience to see colonization and appropriation as steps in the creation of a new language. Welcoming the Teatro Buendía troupe to the Globe Theatre, artistic director Mark Rylance said, “We would like of you to think of Shakespeare as a world poet. Most of his stories were set abroad, most of them were drawn from stories from other cultures” (videorecording of *Otra Tempestad*). Both Rylance and Carrió attempt to reconfigure the concept of ‘Shakespeare’ as a global rather than an imperial voice. In *Otra Tempestad*, Shakespeare is not the voice of literary and cultural authority that must be undermined; instead, he becomes a symbol of cultural hybridity and mobility—a place where diverse traditions can meet and merge.

## SECTION IV

### CONCLUSION

In an increasingly globalized world where Shakespeare has been used both to constrain and liberate those who identify with Shakespeare's 'others,' the study of Shakespeare's Afterlife takes on greater significance. While the study of Shakespeare's Afterlife is an acknowledged area of Shakespeare scholarship, it has traditionally been regarded as something of a 'fringe specialty'—not as legitimate as studying Shakespeare's texts themselves. Recently, however, the worldwide impact of Shakespeare's plays has become more culturally relevant. As Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia argue in *Native Shakespeares* (2004), "a new progressive internationalism has slowly—and some would say 'at long last'—reshaped the academic discourses of intellectual labor...creating the opportunity for truly multiregional conferences and festivals to address a new 'global Shakespeare'" (5). The feminist and postcolonial transformations that I cover in this dissertation represent a significant contribution to the emerging trend of global Shakespeare and the legitimization of Afterlife studies. By using adaptation as a form of literary and social criticism, these authors establish Shakespeare's characters as recognizable symbols of textual and political marginalization.

Adaptation serves as an important measure of Shakespeare's reception. Figuring out what successive generations feel needs to be changed, omitted, or added to a play can

give us insight into both the text itself and the culture that appropriates it. Literary transformations, like criticism, give readings of Shakespeare which reveal what aspects of the plays each author or movement finds appealing or problematic. The practice of using displacing adaptations to provide companion texts that illuminate or challenge Shakespeare's texts is characteristic of twentieth-century appropriations of Shakespeare, from Ionesco and Brecht to Vogel and Carrió. Early avant-garde adaptations of Shakespeare paved the way for the complex political statements of feminist and postcolonial appropriations that I study in this dissertation. As we enter the second decade of the new millennium, however, Shakespearean appropriation is starting to move beyond the fringes and the margins to take a more prominent place in Shakespeare studies.

Shakespearean adaptations, rather than being seen as trivial or derivative, are now taken more seriously by some prominent scholars and institutions. A journal of Shakespeare adaptation called "Borrowers and Lenders" won the award for Best New Journal of 2007 from the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (Borrowers and Lenders). The journal's editorial board includes some of the most prominent names in Feminist and Postcolonial Shakespeare Studies (including Christy Desmet, Juliet Dusinberre, and Ania Loomba). The Shakespeare Studies MA program at King's College in The University of London now has course modules on 'Hamlet and its Afterlife' and 'Global Shakespeare' taught by the editors of the Arden Shakespeare editions. Harvard University recently replaced its 'Shakespeare' requirement with a 'Shakespeares' requirement. In the Fall 2009 semester, this requirement could be met by taking the "Theater, Dream, Shakespeare" course, team taught by Marjorie Garber and Diane

Paulus, artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre (Harvard University Extension). In addition to Shakespeare's plays, the course also included examinations of the response texts performed in The American Repertory Theater's "Shakespeare Exploded" event, including *The Donkey Show*, *The Best of Both Worlds*, and *Sleep No More* (Ireland). No one could see *The Donkey Show* and consider it a highbrow text, but its place as an adaptation of Shakespeare makes it required reading for this Harvard 'Shakespeares' course.

Stephen Greenblatt, known for his new historical criticism that ties Shakespeare's play to the time and place they were initially performed, has also recently branched out into Shakespeare's Afterlife. Along with playwright Charles Mee, who is known for creating plays that adapt the work of other authors, Greenblatt authored and produced the play *Cardenio*. By adapting a lost play by Shakespeare (which was itself an adaptation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*), Greenblatt hoped to "explore how a dramatist crafts a play" using Mee's "cut-and-paste methods of 'resituating and appropriating' materials," which "reminded him of William Shakespeare's manner of writing" (Fanger). But Greenblatt's project goes beyond one adaptation of a lost play. Using funds from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Greenblatt has created a global network of *Cardenio* adaptations by approaching authors and theater companies from around the world and asking them to produce their own *Cardenios*. The resulting adaptations came from a variety of countries, including Spain, Croatia, and Japan (Gorfinkle). The *Cardenio* project reinforces my argument that adaptations are an act of literary and cultural criticism as well as artistic creation. Greenblatt's latest works have moved away from new historicism, towards an examination of the ways that texts and ideas change to fit new contexts. Greenblatt refers

to “this endless adaptation of theatrical works as ‘cultural mobility,’ the taking of a plot, characters and text, and working them around until they’re meaningful and even inspirational to certain people, in a certain place at a certain time” (Gorfinkle).

Greenblatt’s concept of cultural mobility points towards future studies of Shakespeare’s Afterlife that are concerned not only with the enduring and ‘universal’ aspects of a text, but also the dissonance used by each culture to claim a text as its own.

When the Globe Theater was constructed on London’s South Bank in the late 1990’s, it quickly established itself as a forum for presenting Shakespeare’s plays in a setting that could be considered more ‘authentic’ because of its resemblance to the theater design of Shakespeare’s time. However, the Globe does not limit itself to reproducing plays as directors imagine they were performed originally. Instead, they offer a wide variety of performance styles, perform new works of drama, and import Shakespeare productions from around the world to perform for London audiences. *Otra Tempestad*, which I covered in the previous chapter, was brought in from Cuba and performed in Spanish. In the same year, the Globe also imported *Umabatha*, a Zulu version of Macbeth adapted by the playwright Welcome Msomi. A few years later, the Globe hosted a Japanese company with their version of *The Comedy of Errors*, renamed *The Kyogen of Errors* and adapted to fit the traditional Kyogen style of comedy. The theater reviewers of London often dismiss these foreign interpretations of Shakespeare as “tourism in reverse—a chance for London theatergoers to catch a bit of foreign exoticism on our own turf” (Curtis 48). However, the fact that the theater is bringing companies from all over the world to perform their interpretations of Shakespeare in their own languages in a

structure called ‘Shakespeare’s Globe’ indicates that the lines between ‘pure Shakespeare’ and ‘Shakespeare’s Afterlife’ are becoming more blurred.

One of the most important institutions to embrace the adaptation of Shakespeare recently is the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon. At a time when the University of London and Harvard University are pairing Shakespeare’s plays with corresponding response texts in an academic context, the Royal Shakespeare Company is making similar pairings in their performances schedule. For example, in 2007, when the company developed Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* for performance, the same actors also performed Eugene Ionesco’s absurdist *Macbett*. Earlier that year, when the company was creating a new production of *Richard III* to fit with a series of history plays, they brought writer and director Sulayman Al-Bassam and his theater troupe from Kuwait to perform their version of *Richard III*. Entitled *Richard III, an Arab Tragedy*, the text presents Richard as a dictator in the style of Saddam Hussein, while Richmond, the first of the Tudors, is portrayed as an American soldier riding in on a tank to establish a new government. While the Royal Shakespeare Company did not collaborate with the Kuwaiti company at all in the direction of their plays, their final scenes were eerily similar, with soldiers training machine guns on the audience as an uneasy peace was reached at the end of the play. For 2010, a production of *King Lear* will be paired with *The Gods Weep*, a new response to *King Lear* by playwright Dennis Kelly. By juxtaposing plays that transform Shakespeare with their own productions of the original text, the RSC invites audiences to make critical connections between the plays, to use the response texts to “bridge the gaps” in Shakespeare’s texts.



Dennis Kelly's play *The Gods Weep* is part of a new initiative at the Royal Shakespeare Company designed to support new playwrights and emphasize the continued relevance of Shakespeare's plays. Within the last five years the RSC has commissioned several plays from contemporary playwrights as responses to Shakespeare. Each author must take their inspiration from one of Shakespeare's plays—adapting a scene, a character, or a plot point in a new context. The Royal Shakespeare Company's website contains the following description of their theatrical responses to Shakespeare:

New plays have the ability to reflect Shakespeare, to transform him and to illuminate meaning. Plays about contemporary experience sit alongside Shakespeare's universality as much as adaptations of plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries reflect recognizable modern experience (Royal Shakespeare Company).

These response texts are characterized by an emphasis on timeliness. They do not necessarily parody Shakespeare or glorify his plays. Instead, they use Shakespeare's plays to address contemporary issues that are important to the playwrights.

Ben Jonson once characterized Shakespeare as “not of an age, but for all time.” Because of Shakespearean appropriation—feminist, postcolonial, and beyond—it is now becoming clearer that Shakespeare is not the exclusive property of one country or literary tradition. His plays have bridged historical, national, and cultural boundaries, and they are now recognized as an acceptable means of expressing ideals and values. The idea that Shakespeare's plays are “for all time” once hinged on seeing Shakespeare as enduring unchanged—a universal textual authority. However, the recent trends in global appropriation serve as reminders that the dissonance and slippage between interpretations of Shakespeare are equally compelling as ‘chronicles of our time.’ As the studies of Shakespeare's Afterlife have led us to the concepts of ‘cultural mobility’ and ‘global

Shakespeare,' the idea of what it means to be a 'universal' author has been reframed for our changing world.

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